

The Island of Fantasy

Fergus Hume



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THE ISLAND OF FANTASY

The
Island of Fantasy

A Romance

By *FERGUS HUME*

*Sorrow and weariness,
Heartache and dreariness,
None should endure;
Scale ye the mountain peak,
Vale o' the fountain seek,
There is the cure.*

IN THREE VOLUMES

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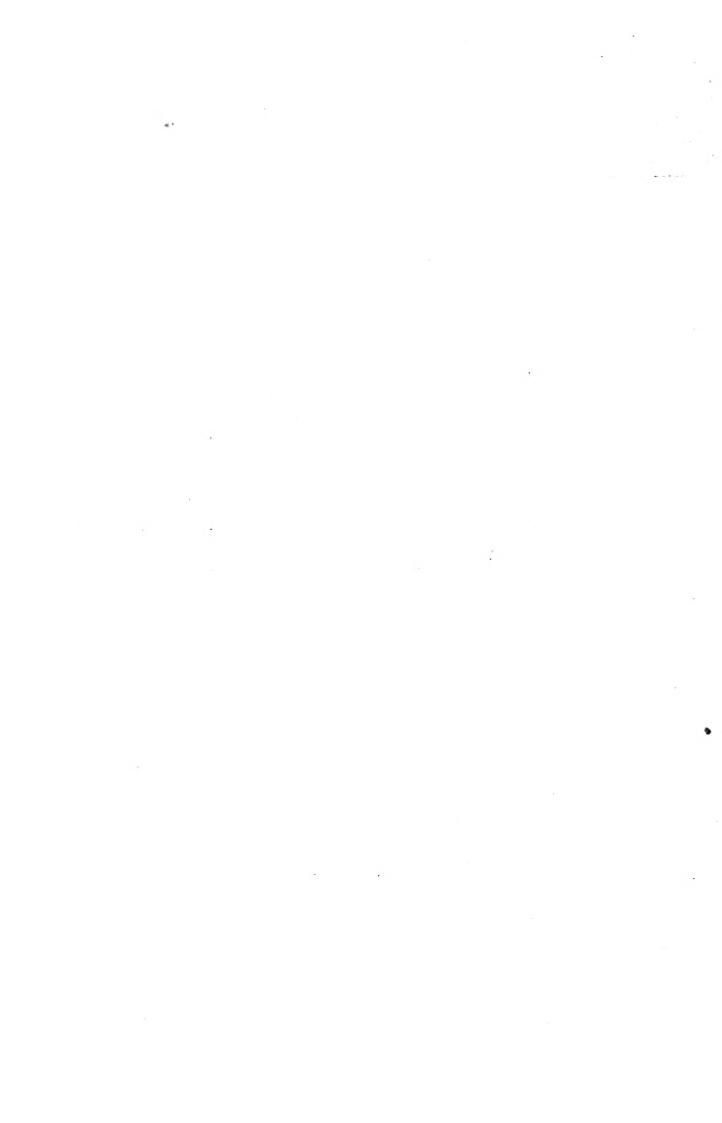
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THE ISLAND OF FANTASY.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEVIL'S PHILOSOPHY.

*Why should I call mankind my brothers,
Or live save for the good of others?
'Twould bring me neither praise nor pleasure,
Nor give me comfort, joy, nor treasure.
Myself by Nature's law I cherish;
If I am saved, let others perish;
For if ill luck Dame Fortune gave me,
None would stretch out a hand to save me.
While life to me means wealth or laughter,
Themselves all paupers can look after;
Than I for hardships they are fitter,
I taste the sweet and they the bitter.
But if such selfish maxims hurt you,
Then live your life of silly virtue,
Let men defraud you in life's barter,
And you will be—a social martyr.*



HE two men stood looking at one another in silence for quite a minute, Crispin cool and composed, the Greek fuming with anger. At length Caliphronas burst out laughing,

and Maurice, seeing he was now master of his actions, let him go, whereon he flung himself into a chair, with a cynical smile on his handsome face.

‘So this dear Crispin has told you who I am, and what I am,’ he said, looking insolently at Maurice. ‘Well, and what do you think of me?’

‘You would hardly feel flattered if I told you,’ retorted Roylands, lighting his cigarette once more.

‘Ah, bah! Praise or blame is all the same to me. Oh, I know your dull English respectability, which shudders at the truth. Yet I daresay, with my little excursions with Alcibiades, my assumption of a false name, my philosophy of enjoying myself at the expense of others, I am no worse than many of your holy people, who go to church, and, under the guise of self-denial, enjoy all that life can give. I may be what you call bad, but I am at least not a hypocrite.’

‘By which remark I presume you infer I am one?’

‘No, I do not. You have not enough character to make you either bad or good. You lead a dull, respectable life, because you like dull respectability. If you had leanings in the other direction, I will do you the justice to say that I have no doubt you would not conceal them from the world.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Maurice dryly ; ‘your opinion of my character is most gratifying.’

‘As to you, Crispin,’ said Caliphronas, turning to the poet with an evil smile, ‘I knew you were prudish in many ways, a milksop, as Justinian called you, and a man afraid of going against the opinion of the world, but I did not know you were an oath-breaker and a tale-bearer.’

‘Nor am I,’ answered Crispin, keeping his temper wonderfully under the insults of the Greek, for, after all, it would have been worse than useless to quarrel with him. ‘I did not tell about Justinian, or of anything connected with your visit to England. All I revealed was my own life and your real character, which it is only right my friend should know.’

‘As for that,’ retorted Caliphronas carelessly, ‘I do not mind. Mask on, mask off, it is all the same to me ; but, as regards what I told you in confidence, I am glad you were wise enough not to reveal it, as you would have had to settle accounts with Justinian, not with me.’

‘I am not afraid of Justinian,’ said Crispin, with supreme contempt.

‘What is this secret?’ asked Maurice quickly ; ‘if it refers to me, I have a right to know it.’

‘It does not refer to you,’ replied Caliphronas mendaciously; ‘it concerns Justinian, and what it is you will learn before you are many days on Melnos.’

‘I do not generally boast about myself,’ said Maurice quickly, ‘but if you and your precious Justinian are up to any tricks, you will find me an awkward customer to deal with.’

‘No harm is intended, Mr. Maurice.’

‘Upon my word, sir, your insolence is unbounded,’ said Roylands, sitting upright in his indignation. ‘I am going to make a tour of the Greek islands, yet you talk as if I were coming on a visit to you—being decoyed, as it were, into a robber’s cave. I don’t care two straws about your “no harm is intended,” and you may be certain if there is any trouble it will be for you, not for me. Really,’ continued Maurice, laughing at the comicality of the situation, ‘one would think we lived in the days of filibusters and buccaneers the way you talk.’

Caliphronas was not put out in the least by this speech, and, leaning back in his chair, looked at Maurice with a lazy smile.

‘There is no pleasure without an element of danger,’ he said coolly, placing his hands behind his head,

‘and you may have adventures before you leave Melnos.’

Struck by the significance of his tone, Maurice looked keenly at him, and then turned to Crispin with a puzzled air.

‘My dear fellow, will you explain this riddle?’

‘There is nothing to explain,’ said Crispin, with a yawn; ‘you know the way Caliphronas exaggerates. I suppose he wants to make out that Melnos is a barbaric place, and that this cruise partakes of the nature of a journey into Darkest Africa.’

‘I have heard more nonsense to-night than I ever heard before in my life,’ said Maurice, still ruffled. ‘Pseudo-counts, patriarchal kings, islands of fantasy, hintings of dangers. It is like a novel of adventure.’

Caliphronas laughed, but said nothing, while Crispin knocked the ashes out of his pipe and refilled it slowly for a last smoke before turning in.

‘I suppose you are very shocked at Crispin’s flattering description of me,’ remarked the Count calmly.

‘Hm! I hardly know. You are a picturesque scamp, but only a scamp for all that.’

‘This candour is delightful.’

‘Caliphronas,’ observed Crispin, settling himself

into a more comfortable attitude, 'is a gentleman who believes that Number One is the greatest number.'

'Every one in the world does that, my dear Crispin.'

'Probably, but they don't show it so openly as you do.'

'Hypocrites!'

'I daresay, but a certain amount of hypocrisy is necessary in this world of shams.'

Maurice looked at Count Constantine with an amused smile.

'Caliphronas, you are a most unique person, and I should like to know your views of life.'

'Make money honestly if you can—but make money.'

'I thought you were a child of Nature, who cared nothing for money.'

'You are right in one way, Mr. Maurice. For money as money I care nothing, but I like the luxuries which only money can buy, and therefore desire money.'

'Epigrammatic, decidedly! but your free, open-air life—your love of mountains, waves, winds, skies?'

'Certainly I love all those things very much.

Still, I go to Athens sometimes for amusement, and amusement requires money.'

'You are certainly candid.'

'I am ; when I have nothing to gain, I am always candid.'

'And you have nothing to gain now?'

'No. I paid a visit to England—out of curiosity, said Caliphronas, hesitating over the last words. 'I met there my dear old friend Crispin, and also yourself. Both of you are returning with me to the land I love—so, what with your company and my home-coming, I have absolutely nothing to wish for.'

'So you are that *rara avis*, a thoroughly satisfied man?'

'I suppose so,' replied Caliphronas coolly. 'No—stay—I do desire one thing which I hope to obtain.'

'I can guess what that one thing is.'

'Indeed ! pray tell me.'

'Well, it is not your mythical Fanariot at Constantinople.'

'Mythical?'

'Yes. Oh, don't be angry, Count Caliphronas ! I now know the reason you were so annoyed over that photograph.'

‘If you do,’ said the Greek, restraining his anger with difficulty, ‘you will know how to act wisely.’

‘Possibly ; I have already arranged my plan of action.’

‘Really?’

Caliphronas had a fleeting smile on his lips as he said this, but looked so dangerous that Crispin touched Maurice on the arm.

‘Do not irritate him any more ; remember he is my guest, and I cannot be impolite.’

Maurice took the hint, and addressed himself to the Count with an air of elaborate politeness.

‘Don’t let us talk any more about possibilities, Count,’ he said, laughing. ‘After all, I have some right to be angry, considering how you masqueraded as a count in England.’

‘And now I am a wolf, eh?’ said Caliphronas, showing his white teeth ; ‘bah ! a wolf may be a very pleasant animal.’

‘Maybe, but from all accounts he is not.’

‘That is as you take him ; but then I know Crispin has prejudiced you against me.’

‘I have done nothing of the sort,’ protested the poet quietly ; ‘I only told him how you were accustomed to associate with Alcibiades.’

‘Eh, and why not? My friend Alcibiades is not a bad man,—a good honest trader who sails about among the islands of the Ægean. I will introduce you to him, Mr. Maurice, and I am sure you will like him. After all, our little piratical excursions are very innocent—no bloodshed—no violence—no burning of houses; we—we only levy toll, so to speak.’

‘What a pleasant way of putting it!’

‘What does it matter if you take openly or take secretly? the thing is the same, but only the mode of doing it is different. What we do in Greece, you do in England, but, simply because the latter is done under the rose and the former is not, your robbers of London are good, honest men, whereas we poor Greeks of the islands are scamps. Never mind, when we become as civilised as you, we also will mask our wickedness under the cloak of sanctity.’

‘Oh,’ cried Crispin, suddenly rising to his feet, ‘I am tired of this discussion! it is all aimless—about ‘no one and no thing. I am going to turn in.’

‘And I—am not,’ added Caliphronas, springing to his feet; ‘fancy going down to a close cabin with such glories as these outside!’

He waved his arms aloft, where the brilliant sky

smiled down on the still waters. Indeed, so placid was the sea, that the stars, moon, and clouds were all reflected therein as in a mirror, and the yacht seemed to hang passive in the centre of a scintillating, hollow ball.

‘When do we reach Melnos?’ asked Maurice abruptly, as Caliphronas strolled away to the other end of the ship.

‘To-morrow evening,’ replied Crispin, pausing at the door of the cabin. ‘We will sleep on board, and visit Justinian in the morning.’

‘Crispin, is there anything in those veiled threats of Caliphronas?’

‘Perhaps,’ replied the poet vaguely. ‘Caliphronas is a dangerous man, and is, as I have told you, a favourite of Justinian’s. However, I should not be surprised if Justinian dismissed Andros and put you in his place.’

‘Thank you,’ said Maurice in haughty surprise, ‘but I have no ambition to occupy such a position.’

‘Maurice,’ said Crispin suddenly, ‘I wish I could tell you all I know, but, unfortunately, I gave my word to Caliphronas not to do so as long as you were unharmed in any way.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I cannot tell you, but only this, which may perhaps serve as a warning,—Caliphronas came to Roylands on purpose to get you to journey to Melnos.’

‘And his reason?’

‘I know it, but I cannot tell you. However, if you should be in any danger,—and I will not conceal from you that there may be danger,—I will consider my promise void and tell you all.’

‘All what?’

‘All about Caliphronas, Justinian, and Helena.’

‘Is she in this plot also?’

‘Plot! yes, it is a plot, the reason of which I know not. Helena is to a certain extent mixed up in it, but innocently, you may be sure.’

‘I cannot understand all this.’

‘Never mind, so long as I understand it you will not suffer. Caliphronas, as I have told you, is a scamp, and will pause at nothing to gratify his own desire. He lured you to Melnos for a purpose, but he did not count on my presence. Listen! he thinks we have gone below, and is telling his secrets to the stars.’

And at this moment, as if Caliphronas knew the subject-matter of their conversation, in the far distance

he broke out into a rich burst of song, the gist of which Crispin rapidly translated to Maurice,—

*'The net is spread and the prey is near,
Drive him into the entanglement.
Ho! my noble stag of Olympus, you are helpless,
And the spear of the hunter will drink your blood
Before the dawn sets rosy foot on blushing mountain-top.'*

'You see,' said Crispin significantly, after translating this, 'he talks in parables, but you can guess his meaning; but do not be afraid. You trust me, do you not?'

'Yes, I trust you,' replied Maurice, grasping the hand held out to him.

'That is right, my friend—good-night.'

When Crispin disappeared, Maurice went to the stern of the ship, and, leaning over the taffrail, fell into deep meditation concerning the strange circumstances by which he was environed. Caliphronas, sitting by the bowsprit, was swaying up and down with the pitching of the yacht, singing songs, now soft, now loud, but this was the only sound of humanity to be heard. The sough of the faint wind through the rigging, the dreary wash of the sea, as the ship cut her way through the glittering plain; the rustle of the cordage, the beating of the screw,—he could hear all these blending with the fitful voice of the Greek. The moon had retired behind a thick bank of black clouds, which foreboded

storm, and the moonlit world was now shadowy, vast, vague, and strange,—a world of shadows and ghosts, with the swift steamer gliding onward into the unknown seas—into the unknown future.

Maurice Roylands was not what one might call a strong-minded man, for, as a matter of fact, he had that subtle touch of indecision which is often found in artistic natures. He was very impressionable, and surrounding circumstances had a great effect on his temperament—still, when he saw his way clearly before him, he was quite capable of making up his mind, and carrying out his determination to the end. But he could never make up his mind promptly, as he wavered this way, or that way,—as he was biassed by circumstances. Had he been of a firm, decisive nature, he would never have yielded to that pitiable melancholia which seized him in London, and would thus have been spared much suffering. Still, in spite of this latent weakness of character, which always developed itself in time of trouble, he was a brave man, with plenty of pluck. In England, notwithstanding his Bohemian existence, his life had progressed too smoothly to call his moral characteristics into any special prominence; but now, surrounded as he was by vague mysteries, he felt doubtful.

Hitherto his existence had been but prosaic, but now the element of romance had entered into it, and he felt that he was being passively drawn into a series of strange adventures, the subsequent termination of which, either for good or evil, lay not in his own hands. Caliphronas had come to England with the deliberate intention of luring him to Melnos ; but what was his reason for this strange conduct ? Certainly Crispin knew, but Crispin, fettered by his promise of secrecy, was unable to solve the problem. The strangest thing of all was that Caliphronas had made use of the picture of a girl he loved, to decoy Maurice to the East, which line of conduct struck the young man as most unaccountable.

If Caliphronas was in love with Helena, it was foolish of him to encourage, as he had undoubtedly done, the love of a rival ; and the result of two men loving one woman must be unsatisfactory to one of them. Of course, Maurice saw that Caliphronas, confident in his beauty of person and powers of fascination, never for a moment doubted the final result ; still, what was the reason of his taking a trip to England especially to bring a rival into the presence of his beloved ? The more Maurice thought about this, the more extraordinary did it seem, and,

as on the whole it was a decided enigma, he was doubtful as to what was the best course to pursue under these very extraordinary circumstances.

True, Crispin, being in possession of the facts of the case, would help him, for the poet was an honest man, and would not stand idly by in time of trouble ; still, there was something in the affair of which even Crispin was ignorant, as he had confessed, and this mysterious something was connected in some way with Justinian. Maurice, after long pondering, came to the conclusion that with Justinian lay the whole solution of the matter, and, as he could decide on no course of action until he had seen Justinian himself, all he could do was to remain passive and trust to Providence.

‘One thing is certain,’ he said to himself, as he watched the grey waters swirling past, ‘I can depend on Crispin, and as he knows Caliphronas thoroughly, that consummate scamp will hesitate before he takes any action adverse to my interests. But Justinian seems very much mixed up in the affair, and apparently without any reason whatsoever. He has lived in this Greek island all his life, Englishman though he is, so why he should desire to see a complete stranger like myself I do not know. Well, the only thing I can do

is to trust blindly in Crispin, for I am sure he will not fail me. Apart from his friendship, it would be against his own interest to play me false, as he would then be unable to marry Eunice. Time alone will unravel all this perplexity, so to time will I trust. After all, I am young and strong, so can defend myself if necessary. And then there is Helena; whatever happens I shall see her—I will see Helena, and'—

'Eh, Mr. Maurice,' said the voice of Caliphronas behind him, 'you have not gone to bed.'

'No, I am thinking.'

'I can guess your thoughts.'

Maurice made no reply to this invitation to argue, but, with a curt 'Good-night,' went below, while in his ears rang the cruel, mocking laugh of the Greek, as he repeated rapidly in a singing tone the name of his mistress,—

'Helena, Helena, Helena!'



CHAPTER XV.

THE STORM.

*Dark storm-clouds spread from pole to pole,
The lightnings flash, the thunders roll,
And lo, the sea, in mountains high,
With giant billows storms the sky,
While all the vast disturbed main
Is veiled in whirling mist and rain.
Betwixt the flying scud and spume,
A ship drifts onward to her doom,
She flies before the raging gale,
With broken mast and tattered sail;
While up through pitchy darkness rolls
The dying cry of drowning souls.*



HAVING passed the Island of Cythera during the night, by next morning the yacht was ploughing the placid waters of the Cretan Sea. Placid these waters generally are, especially during the months of the halcyon, but now a stiff breeze was blowing steadily from the north, which by noon increased to a fierce gale. As far as the eye could see, there appeared nothing but a vast expanse

of tumbling waves, their whiteness above accentuated by the green blackness below, as they flung their shattered spray as in derision against the grim sky. Threatening masses of gloomy clouds lay along the northern horizon, fronted by the bleak island of Santorin, which scowled in savage grandeur in the cloudy distance. Grey sky, grey sea, driving rain, and sudden gusts of wind, making the straining sails crack like pistol-shots with the violent lurching of the vessel ;—it was like a North Sea picture ; and none surveying the dreary scene would have believed the boat was sailing over the enchanting waters of the Mediterranean.

The three gentlemen, after an uncomfortable breakfast, owing to the rolling of the yacht, which upset everything on the table in spite of the fiddles, were now on deck, holding on to whatever they could support themselves by, for *The Eunice* tossing about like a cork in the yeasty surge, made it a matter of no small difficulty for those on board to retain their equilibrium. Wrapped up in oilskins, they were sufficiently dry and warm, for, in spite of the mist and drenching rain, the weather was not in the least chilly—a thing to be thankful for in such a predicament. The yacht, schooner-rigged fore and aft, was a capital sea boat ;

so, apprehending no danger, they joked and laughed, during the lulls of the gale, at their hardships, and gazed with interest on the wild spectacle afforded by the seething waters. Maurice and the poet were comforting themselves with tobacco, while Caliphronas, excited by the wildness of the scene, was clinging to the weather rigging, and facing the keen whips of wind, rain, and spray like some antique sea-god. Occasionally he would shout out a few sentences to his companions, but, owing to the tumult around, they could only catch his meaning every now and then.

‘Often like this—Ægean!—sudden gales—have no fear.’

‘Confound that man!’ growled Maurice, who was standing shoulder to shoulder with Crispin; ‘he thinks no one has any pluck but himself.’

‘On the contrary, he is trying to keep up his spirits,’ replied Crispin, steadying himself with difficulty as the yacht took a big dip into the trough of the sea; ‘there is a good deal of brag about Caliphronas, but if we were in any real danger he would not crow so loudly. These Greeks are all afraid of the sea; and if the colonisation of the world had been left to them, I am afraid America would never have been discovered.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because they are always afraid of venturing out of sight of the land. They slip about boldly enough among these isles of Elishah, as Ezekiel calls them, but if they lose sight of Mother Earth, all their courage leaves them. Their Hellenic ancestors were just the same, for all their poets call Ocean names, such as “a hungry beast,” “a ravenous monster,” and similar pleasant titles. I think Æschylus, with his “multitudinous laughter of the sea,” is the only poet who pays Ocean a compliment.’

‘Yet the Greek genius has produced a great sea drama in the *Odyssey*.’

‘A voyage of necessity, not pleasure — Man the sport of the unjust gods ; but I fancy Ulysses had a touch of the adventurous Phœnician in his blood. Besides, Greek bravery produced a great sea drama at Salamis ; yet, withal, I decline to believe the Hellenes, ancient or modern, were sailors.’

‘Yet Arnold calls them “The young, light-hearted masters of the wave.”’

‘A charming line, which but applies to Ægean waters. Masters of the wave, forsooth ! Why, they were never masters of anything liquid larger than a puddle. The Greeks never loved Nature in her

grandest moods, and—saving Æschylus—both shaggy mountain and roaring waters were alien to their genius.'

'Yet they loved Nature.'

'Nature the Mother, not Nature the Enemy. Hill, meadow, wood, fountain, river they loved ; but mountain and ocean they feared.'

'Would a Greek Wordsworth have been possible?'

'Ah, now you open up a large field of inquiry ! No ; I do not think that the actual spirituality of Wordsworth would have appealed to a Greek. The Hellenic poet of that class would have been like Keats—he would have sung exquisitely of vitalised Nature, of her incarnate forces, Pan and Demeter, nymphs and satyrs ; but none but a modern poet, conversant with the haggardness of modern life, with his soul steeped in the religion of the unseen, could have produced those "thoughts too deep for tears" such as we find in Wordsworth. Theocritus and Bion are your Nature poets of external loveliness, but Arnold and Wordsworth sang deeper strains, and sought the naked soul of Nature, which was but a veiled Isis to the Greek.'

'Hallo ! what island is that ?' cried Maurice, who had been idly listening to such fragments of this discourse as he had caught. 'Look to your left.'

In the misty distance a great black mass loomed vague and indistinct on the lee side of the vessel, apparently about seven miles off, though the magnifying vapour seemed to bring it nearer.

‘I am not sure,’ replied Crispin, straining his eyes ;
‘we are in the middle of a number of islets.’

‘The deuce ! isn’t that rather dangerous ?’

‘It would be to any one who did not know these waters ; but Martin has been here with me often before, and knows every rock in the vicinity. Besides, we are comparatively safe, as the engines are of large horse-power compared with the size of the boat.’

Martin was the captain of the yacht, and at present was personally attending to the wheel, with an anxious expression on his weather-beaten face, for it was no light task to steer the boat safely through these clusters of islands, especially when the magnifying properties of the mist caused them to appear in dangerous proximity to the ship, thus deceiving the eye into thinking she was entangled among hidden reefs. Luckily Captain Martin had a clear head, and, being a splendid seaman, knew the capabilities of *The Eunice* thoroughly ; so Crispin felt quite content to leave affairs in his hands, so long as he was at the helm.

‘Kamila!’ shouted Caliphronas, alluding to the misty island.

‘No,’ shouted back Crispin; ‘Kamila too far off.’

‘Kamila!’ cried the Greek for the second time, whereupon Crispin was much impressed with his insistence.

‘Caliphronas knows these seas thoroughly,’ he said to Maurice quietly; ‘he has sailed all over them with his rascal friend; so if this is Kamila, we must be nearer Melnos than I thought.’

‘Had you not better see Martin?’ suggested Maurice, shaking himself like a huge water-dog, as a shower of spray flew over him.

Crispin nodded an assent, and began to struggle towards the wheel, where Martin was standing. It was rather difficult, owing to the slipperiness of the wet deck and the tossing of the yacht, which one moment would be poised on the crest of a wave, and the next engulfed in a foam-streaked valley of green water, which threatened to swamp her. However, by holding on to anything he could seize, Crispin managed to get close to the captain, who, in his efforts to keep the ship’s head right, was straining every muscle to hold the wheel, which was almost torn out

of his grasp in a retrograde direction, every time a wave smashed against her helm.

‘Kamila!’ screamed Crispin in Martin’s ear, as he pointed to the dim mass.

Martin shook his head doubtfully.

‘Too far south’ard. We’re nigher Anapli, I reckon.’

‘And Melnos?’

‘Straight ahead. Who says ’tis Kamila.’

‘Count Caliphronas!’

‘Hum! he knows these parts too. I’ll go and have another look at the chart.’

‘If it’s Kamila, Melnos is just round the shoulder.’

‘Can’t believe we’ve got so far out of the course. Why, if’—

At this moment a tremendous wave struck the yacht midships, making her reel and strain under the irresistible blows of the sea, and the jolly-boat on the port side was smashed up like matchwood, the iron davits being twisted out of all shape in the giant grip of the water. *The Eunice* shuddered under the stroke, paused almost imperceptibly, then sprung forward like a spur-touched horse, and in another second was out of danger, riding lightly on the frothing crest of a huge wave, from whence she

slid down smoothly into the smaragdine hollow beyond.

‘Boat gone!’ quoth the captain, regaining his breath; ‘bad loss.’

Crispin thought so too, but had no time to reply, for at this moment the raucous voice of the captain was heard shouting to the second officer as he passed by.

‘Send Gurt here! look sharp!’

Gurt was a grizzled old salt with one eye, and an unlimited capacity for rum, who, having knocked about in these latitudes all his sinful life, knew the Archipelago like a book. When he arrived, the captain put him in charge of the wheel, and went off, not to his cabin to look at the chart, but down to the engine-room, as he feared for the safety of the propeller. Crispin followed him, and they staggered like drunken men along the streaming decks towards the hatch. Down the iron ladder leading to the engine-room they scrambled, holding on like grim death, for the yacht was now rolling at an angle of twenty-five degrees, an uncomfortable motion which she occasionally varied by dipping her bows so deeply into the water that her stern was sticking nearly straight up in the air, in fact, to use a nautical expression, she stood on her head.

The screw beat the waves regularly enough when in its normal position, but the moment the yacht lifted, it was out of the water, whirling round and round with tremendous velocity, coming down again with a resonant smash, which threatened to snap off short the huge fans of the propeller. To obviate this danger, Martin spoke to the chief engineer, who, at once recognising the perilous position, took his station beside the throttle-valve, and immediately the yacht dipped her nose, shut off steam, so that, when she plunged her stern again into the waters, the down-stroke was not so dangerous to the motionless blades.

The enormous steel bars of the cranks, shining with oil in the dim lamplight, arose and fell irregularly, owing to the pitching of the vessel, one moment slowing down to half speed, the next beating the air as rapidly as the wings of a swallow. Round and round swept the giant wheels with noiseless speed, and nothing could be heard but the lash of the waves thrashing the sides of the yacht, the intermittent throbbing of the machinery, and the sharp hiss of escaping steam ; but the moment the engineer put his hand to the throttle-valve, in an instant the screw, already spinning like a top, hung motionless, until, with the recur-

ring lurch the great pistons again began to slide smoothly in and out of the cylinders. It was wonderful to see the absolute command this one man had over the colossal mass of machinery, which worked or rested as he let on or shut off steam at every plunge of the ship.

As Martin and the poet returned to the deck, they heard the smashing of dishes in the pantry, the subsequent bad language of the stewards, and *The Eunice* groaned, creaked, strained, and shrieked like a living being as she strove to make headway against the furious blast.

‘All right!’ yelled Crispin when they were once more on the streaming decks.

‘Right enough, as long as we’re in the open sea,’ retorted Martin gloomily, ‘but Lord help us if we touch any of them darned reefs.’

The islands of the Ægear: are very dangerous to ships, as their ragged reefs, running out to sea like roots, can scarcely be noticed save in calm weather, when the thin line of white breaking on the smooth surface of the water betrays the hidden teeth below. It was of these treacherous reefs the captain was afraid, as in such a furious gale there was every chance of the ship striking, in spite of the utmost care

being taken to navigate her properly. Fortunately, with her helm and screw, which were to her as a bridle is to a horse, *The Eunice* could skirt these perils with the greatest dexterity, and the real danger lay in the chance of her running on some sunken rock not set down in the chart. Martin, doubtful as to the island on the lee side, went off to his cabin for the chart, knowing he could safely leave the steering to Gurt, who indeed was better than any chart, and knew more of these seas than all the Admiralty put together.

Crispin returned to Maurice, and reported all that had been done, much to Roylands' satisfaction, for, however brave a man may be, it is not pleasant to think that every moment he may be hurled into eternity. Caliphronas was still clinging to the weather rigging, but his face was graver than of yore, for he too knew the dangers of these waters, and good ship though *The Eunice* was, an unknown rock piercing her bottom would sink her rapidly, while the furious waves dashing against her, thus firmly held, would not leave enough of her stout timbers to make a cigar-box.

All that afternoon they continued beating about in that weary sea near the Island of Kamila, for Kamila it proved to be on examination of the chart, much to

the vexation of Captain Martin, who was considerably startled to find he was out of his course. However, such ignorance was not unpardonable, as the divergence from the course arose from the fact that, owing to the captain being constantly at the wheel, and only hastily glancing at the chart when he was able, he did not notice sufficiently the constant sagging of the vessel, and she had therefore, unknown to him, drifted more to the south than he fancied.

Contrary to his expectation, the gale, instead of abating, increased in fury, and great masses of blinding rain came sweeping down in torrents on the ship, while the gusty wind, straining the wet sails to their utmost tension, tautened the weather rigging like bars of steel. The crew were all picked men, forty in number, the captain was a first-class sailor, the engines powerful, the boat staunch, yet all these could avail but little against the colossal force of wind and wave, which seemed resolved to conquer this brave little craft struggling so gallantly against their Titanic forces.

Meals that day they had none, for it was impossible to sit at the table, but the steward cut some sandwiches, with which, in conjunction with brandy and water, they were able to sustain themselves.

Even Caliphronas, quite contrary to his usual custom, was so overwhelmed by the peril of their position, that he took some spirits, which brought the colour back to his pale cheeks. Maurice was not at all afraid, having plenty of British pluck, and, but for Helena, would have cared but little if his unhappy life was ended by the seething mass of waters raging on all sides.

Owing to the cloudy sky, the incessant rain, and the absence of sunlight, the darkness fell sooner than usual, with sudden transition from day to night. No more the enchanted twilight of the previous evening, the calm sea, silver moon, and glittering star ; nothing but pitchy gloom, with roaring waves rising in liquid masses to the black sky, and black sky raining down torrents on roaring waves, while between the welkin and the spume flew *The Eunice* like a stormy petrel, keeping afloat only through the dexterity with which she was managed. At times a jagged flash of lightning gleaming blue as steel divided the solid blackness with sabre-like stroke, but the succeeding thunder, loud as it was, hardly added to the deafening clamour of the storm, which stunned the ears of those human beings, fighting so determinedly for their lives against the appalling forces of Nature.

“Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground,”’ quoted Crispin grimly, as he clung to a stout rope. ‘My faith, I don’t think we are born to be hanged, Maurice!’

‘Do you think there is danger, Crispin?’ cried Caliphronas, whose teeth were chattering in his head.

‘Rather; we might go to the bottom any moment,’ replied Maurice, who, despite the peril of the position, could not help smiling at the cowardice of the Greek. ‘Be a man, Caliphronas!—you aren’t afraid of death, I suppose?’

‘Oh, but I am!—I am!’ shivered the Count in abject fear. ‘To leave this world I love for I know not what. Oh, what comes after?’

‘God!’ said Crispin solemnly.

‘God!’ echoed the Greek in a tone of despairing conviction. ‘What is God? I know nothing beyond this world—what I see!—what I feel!—nothing else. But you say there is a God!—there is a God! Oh, what will He say to me?’

‘Ask your own conscience.’

‘Conscience!’ cried Caliphronas, with a sneer, which but ill became his ghastly face; ‘what do I know of conscience? I have been wicked, but no

worse than my neighbours. After all, it is death and then—annihilation. It is that I fear—to no longer see the sun, nor feel the wind, nor life in the veins. Life is so glad, death so terrible! But I will undo some of my work that you saints call wicked. Yes, I will tell you, Mr. Maurice, the reason I brought you to Melnos.’

‘Oh, tell me, tell me!’ cried Maurice eagerly; ‘you brought me here to’—

He did not finish the sentence, for at this moment a gust of unexampled strength tore past them with a shriek, and snapped the mainmast by the board, crashing it downward with tremendous force. Falling over the side, it impeded the yacht’s course, and brought her gunwale dangerously near the water. The black smoke poured in volumes from her funnel, the screw beat the water with enormous power, but the heavy mass, the huge canvas, the entanglement of ropes, all held her back, and down on one side, to the great imperilling of her safety.

‘Axes!’ roared Martin, in a voice of thunder; ‘cut away the ropes! Look smart, my lads, for your lives! If she pitches to wind’ard, and brings the mast against the bilge, it’s all Davy Jones for sure!’

The sailors flew to do his bidding, and though,

owing to the perpetual pitching of the vessel, they could not work continuously, yet in the space of half an hour they managed to clear away the wreckage, which fell over into the boiling waters, while the yacht righted herself like a trembling deer. The man at the wheel of course kept the set course indicated by the captain, but, the engines being slowed down during the clearance episode, the ship sagged gradually to leeward, until she drifted dangerously near to the rocks of Kamila.

All were so busily engaged clearing away the wreckage, that this new peril was unnoticed, until the moon, half-obsured by the flying scud, shone out palely on the wild scene. Attracted by the glimmer of the planet, Martin looked up suddenly from his work, only to see the towering cliffs of the island near at hand, and the caps of the sea rising like fountains of spouting foam over the cruel-looking rocks.

Roaring to pass the word to the engineer to give her every inch of steam she was worth, in order to shoot her far enough ahead to clear the rocks, Martin sprang with one bound to the wheel, wrenched it out of the sailor's hands, and put the helm hard down, so that the yacht's head flew up in the wind just in

time to avert a frightful catastrophe. Immediately on the increased speed on the vessel, she plunged forward into every wave, and all on board feared that each new dive into the head sea would be the last, for she shipped seas freely, and tons of water swept her decks fore and aft. At the last fearful dive, there was the sound of a sudden snap, as if the boat had touched a rock ; she shuddered through her whole length, and after the engines had whirled for a minute with inconceivable velocity, they suddenly stopped.

‘My God!’ cried Martin, guessing the reason of the stoppage ; ‘the propeller has gone! God help us now!’

Fortunately, the way the ship had through the water shot her to windward sufficiently to clear the Kamila reef, but, as she could not be kept head to sea, owing to the fury of the gale, she had again to be kept off, so that the remaining sails would tend to steady her from the violent lurching. All this time the steam was blowing off ; and then, the fires being drawn, all the sooty inhabitants of the engine-room, like so many Cyclops, poured on deck, to do what they could to save the vessel.

During the time she was clearing the reef, the

moon had withdrawn her light, but she now shone forth in her full splendour through a rent in a cloud, whereupon a sight was revealed which struck terror into the hearts of all on board.

‘Melnos!’ cried Crispin and the Greek in one breath.

‘It’s all over!’ said Martin gloomily. ‘No screw—only one mast—we’ll never clear that island.’

Maurice, straining his eyes through the glimmer of moon and star, half-obsured by flying clouds, saw a high, conical-shaped mountain, rising sheer out of the sea, at a distance of about three miles. The snows of the summit gleamed pale in the moonlight, below was darkness, but at the base of the peak spouted fountains of white surf on the jagged rocks running seaward.

‘It’s kingdom come, gentlemen,’ said the captain, with a grim smile, as he looked at that sky-piercing peak looming hugely in the vague light.

‘The boats’—began Caliphronas, who was quite pale; whereupon Martin turned on him sharply.

‘The boats, sir! what boats could live in that sea? The jolly-boat is gone—the steam pinnace is pretty well smashed up, so there are only the gig and the lifeboat to save forty-five lives.’

‘You’ll try and launch the boats, at all events,’ said Crispin quickly.

‘Oh yes! all that can be done will be done, you can depend, sir; but it’s a poor look-out.’

With these dispiriting words, the captain went away to see after the life-belts, and served out one to each man, which gave them at least some chance of floating to land. Martin neglected no chance of saving the ship, and put the helm up, whereon the fierce wind filled the remaining canvas, and drove *The Eunice* slowly ahead. For fully an hour she drifted to leeward, now being quite unmanageable, owing to the loss of screw and mast. Straight ahead lay Melnos, with the fierce surf thundering at its base, and the ship, unable to be guided, was drifting slowly but surely on to the rocks. Maurice, with considerable forethought, took Crispin with him below, and they filled their travelling-flasks with brandy. Meanwhile, the crew, utterly demoralised by the hopelessness of the situation, made for the spirit-room; but the captain placed himself in front of it with a revolver, and swore to shoot the first man who came forward. Still, as the men were weary from work, and wet and cold with long exposure, he ordered rum to be served out, which

reconciled them somewhat to his prohibition of too much drinking.

‘Die like men, not beasts,’ said Martin, thrusting the revolver back again when the crew were more manageable; ‘there is still a chance of saving our lives by the boats, and that will be gone if drink is in you.’

By this time the yacht was so near the island that they could hear the roar of the surf, and see the white tongues of the waves running up the black rocks. Overhead heavy masses of clouds were moving like battalions across the sky, but the rain had ceased, and at intervals the moon shone out, which gave them but small comfort, as it enabled them to see only too clearly the perils which awaited them. The wind was still furious, and the sea rolling mountains high, its huge billows, topped with ragged fringes of foam, glimmering in the fitful light, kept sweeping over the deck. Several men were swept overboard into the trough of the sea, but no assistance could be rendered by those on board, and with despairing cries they sank in the furious waters.

Crispin, pitying the terror of Caliphronas, in spite of his dislike for the wily Greck, took him below and gave him some brandy. The Count was just

raising the glass to his lips, when they were both levelled by a tremendous shock, which made the ship tremble from stem to stern.

‘God! she has struck!’ cried Crispin, and tore up the stairs as hard as he was able, followed by Caliphronas, who was now nerved by despair.

The Eunice had struck about a quarter of a mile from the shore, but so fierce were the waves between her and the land, that it seemed as though no boat could live in that hell of waters. However, as a last hope, the captain ordered the lifeboat to be lowered, which was accordingly done; but the moment it touched the water all discipline was at an end, for the men, seeing the means of safety, rushed in a tumultuous crowd to take advantage of it. In a few minutes the lifeboat was filled with a black mass of human beings, in spite of the captain’s efforts to maintain order, and cutting the ropes they made for the shore. Hardly had the boat left the ship, when, caught by a huge wave, she capsized, and the waves were black with shrieking masses of humanity.

‘O God! O God!’ groaned Crispin, hiding his face; ‘they will all be drowned.’

And so they were, for, in spite of their life-belts, the waves gripped the drowning men with irresistible

force, and dashed them mangled corpses against the rocks. Of the crowd of living, breathing creatures that had gone off a few minutes before, not one remained alive, and the survivors felt that their fate would be the same.

‘Lower away the gig!’ shouted Martin, going up to where the boat was hanging; ‘and if you cowards rush her, I’ll shoot freely.’

Cowed by his revolver, which was covering them with its six deadly cartridges, the men did as they were ordered, and, placing the boat in charge of the mate, the captain made them all get in in orderly fashion.

‘Now, gentlemen,’ said Martin to the three who stood near him, ‘get in quick—the yacht will soon be under water.’

‘But yourself?’

‘It’s my duty to stick to the ship,’ said the brave old man; ‘if she goes down, I go down—if she doesn’t, there will be hope of safety; but I will be the last to leave her.’

‘There’s room in the boat,’ called the mate; ‘quick, for your lives!’

Caliphronas needed no urging, but sprang into the boat, then, either from treachery or terror, cut the

rope which held her to the yacht with a knife he had in his hand. There was a shout of execration from the crew, but the act was irremediable, and the gig plunged away into the darkness; the last seen by the four survivors on deck being Caliphronas, furiously fighting with two of the men, who were trying to hurl him overboard.

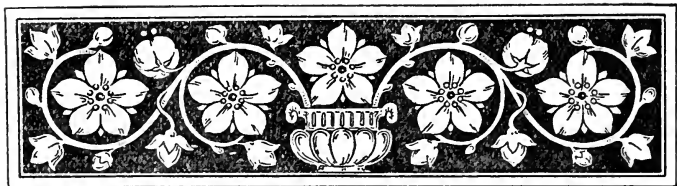
The yacht was now nearly under water, and on her deck stood Martin, Maurice, Crispin, and Gurt.

‘Only one hope,’ cried Martin, furiously shaking his fist at the retreating boat; ‘climb up the mast!’

They flew to the weather rigging, and Maurice, Crispin, and Gurt managed to climb up, but just as Martin was springing for the rope, a heavy sea swept the yacht fore and aft, and he was carried overboard. They heard his despairing cry as he went down into the trough of the sea, but there was no time to do anything, for with one final plunge the yacht went down, and the three human beings scrambled up the rigging as fast as they could, followed by the water, which seemed loath to surrender its prey. Fortunately *The Eunice* had sunk near the shore, so, when she finally settled down, about thirty feet of the remaining mast was sticking up out of the water, and to this clung the three survivors in desperate

anxiety, expecting every moment to be shaken off into the depths below. At any moment the mast might break off, or a roll of the submerged yacht send it into the water ; so, with this terrible dread in their hearts, these three human beings clung madly to their only refuge.

Below raged the fierce waters, around was the darkness, above the clouded sky and the veiled moon, while amid all this horror hung those three unfortunates to their slender spar, waiting with mingled dread and hope for the morning's light



CHAPTER XVI.

MELNOS.

*Magic isles of beauty glowing
Far in tideless sapphire seas ;
Wanton winds, low breathing, blowing
Perfumes from balsamic trees.
Here no wintry waters freeze ;
But the streamlets ever flowing,
Murmur drowsy lullabies,
Which the eyelids close unknowing,
Till the soul in slumber lies,
Peaceful under peaceful skies.*



NATURE is fond of contrasts, and delights in the unexpected ; therefore, after the gloom and tumult of the previous night, the morning showed the three castaways a scene of peaceful beauty so enchanting, that they thought they were in fairyland. The sea had gone down after midnight, and only a heavy ground-swell remained to tell of the fury of the storm that had wrecked *The Eunice*. All around lay an expanse of sapphire sea, touched

here and there with white foam, which turned to crimson as the morn dawned redly in the grey eastern skies. High into the cloudless blue arose the giant peak of Melnos, its lofty summit swathed in snows already bathed in the heavy yellow beams of the rising sun. Below its white cap, appeared a green mantle of foliage, quite hiding the bare rock with a profusion of myrtles, plane trees, arbutus, ilex, and branching heather; and lower still the red tint of the rugged cliffs, the black chaotic boulders of the beach scattered in huge masses, and in and out of these the white threads of surf and sand like fairy lacework. Far away to the north rose the island of Kamila, faint and cloud-like in the midst of the blue seas, and on the murmuring waters played gentle breezes, breathing fragrant balms robbed from aromatic trees. It was a scene of unexampled beauty, and even the three unfortunates clinging to the mast could not withhold their admiration, in spite of the discomforts from which they were suffering.

‘Once we are on shore,’ said Crispin, with confidence, ‘I will take you into the interior of the island, where we shall be looked after by Justinian.’

‘Has the island an interior?’ asked Maurice

sceptically, for he saw nothing but a huge mountain resting on the azure sea.

‘Of course! Did I not tell you it was the Island of Fantasy, and therefore full of wonders? But the first thing is to get to land. What do you say, Gurt?’

‘Swim, sir.’

‘I feel too stiff,’ said Crispin, shaking his head. ‘I could not swim a yard—and you, Maurice?’

‘I am in the same plight,’ replied Roylands, whose joints were aching with the exposure to the night. ‘If it’s a question of swimming, I shall have to remain here till doomsday.’

‘I kin swim, gentlemen,’ said Gurt stoutly. ‘Bless ye, this ain’t nothin’, this ain’t. Why, I’ve bin wrecked in the nor’ard, and precious cold it were. I kin get ashore all safe, but I dunno ’bout you, sirs.’

Gurt’s face assumed the wrapt expression of one who was thinking out a deep problem, and Maurice, knowing the inventiveness of sailors, did not interrupt him, having every confidence that this mariner would hit upon some plan of extricating them from their dilemma.

‘There are plenty of ropes,’ suggested Crispin hopefully, ‘and if’—

‘Right y’ are, sir,’ said Gurt energetically, his one

eye flashing with satisfaction. 'I'll tie 'em together and swim ashore. Fust I'll tie the rope t' th' mast an' then t' th' beach, an' you two kin slip along like monkeys. D'ye see, sirs?'

No sooner was the plan thought of than the energetic Gurt proceeded to put it into practice, and being armed with that useful implement, a jack-knife, which no sailor is ever without, spliced together all the ropes he could get hold of.

'It's 'bout quart'r mile fro' shore,' said Gurt, fastening one end of the rope to the mast and the other round his waist; 'but if rope ain't long 'nough, you gents tie on more, an' pay out. Here's knife.'

Crispin took the knife, so as to be ready for such an emergency, and then gave Gurt his spirit-flask, from which the mariner drew new life, although he was pleased to regret that the contents were not rum, instead of brandy. Having thus revived himself, Gurt, with the rope round his waist, scrambled down into the calm water, and was soon striking out boldly for the shore. Maurice and the poet watched his black head bobbing up and down in the blue, and kept paying out the rope carefully, lest any entanglement should hamper the swimmer.

'Thank Heaven, he's all right!' cried Crispin in a

tone of relief, as they saw the white figure of the sailor clambering over the black rocks. 'Now it's our turn.'

In order to swim freely, Gurt had stripped naked, so the two left on the mast had to carry his clothes to shore, a thing easy enough, as all Gurt wore was a shirt and a pair of blue serge trousers. Crispin took the one article, Maurice the other, and waited for Gurt to signal from the shore that the rope was made fast. Soon they saw him waving his hand, and shouting to intimate all was right; whereupon they examined the knot of the rope to see that it was fast to the mast, and then slid down into the sea.

The rope was pretty well taut, as it ran from the mast to the shore, so Crispin and Maurice, holding on to it, struggled along towards the land. Their limbs ached with pain, owing to their long exposure to the night-air, but a drink of spirits each, put new vigour into their wearied frames, and, after a toilsome journey, aided by the rope, they managed to reach the beach, up which they scrambled with thankful hearts.

'All right, sirs?' asked Gurt, dressing himself rapidly.

‘Stiff,’ replied Crispin ruefully. ‘I feel as creaky as an old door!’

‘Ain’t used t’ it,’ grinned Gurt, shifting his quid; for, during all the trouble and danger, he had retained that as his only solace. ‘Well, I guess, sirs, we’d best take more rum, an’ then explore this here island.’

‘Oh, I know all about it,’ said Crispin cheerfully. ‘But see, the sun is up, so, as it is no use trudging about in wet clothes, we had better dry them.’

The two gentlemen stripped at once, and spread their clothing out to dry on the black rocks; but Gurt, disdaining such luxury, perched himself in a sunny place, and watched them swimming in the shallow waters near shore to refresh their weary limbs. The sun was now considerably above the horizon, burning hotly in a cloudless blue sky, and the sultry rays soon drying the clothes spread out on the rocks, in a short time they were dressed again, and ready to start out in search of Justinian.

True, they were very hungry, but Crispin had some biscuits in his pocket, which appeased their appetites in some measure, and, after a good drink of brandy each, they began to trudge along the stony beach, guided by the poet, to whom every inch of the island was as familiar as was his own face. The reddish cliffs

and white sand of the beach, catching the hot sunlight, threw out intense heat, and, from being cold, the three adventurers soon became uncomfortably warm.

‘Do you think Caliphronas is safe?’ asked Maurice hesitatingly, as they walked along.

‘Caliphronas has nine lives, like a cat,’ retorted Crispin savagely; ‘but, after his treachery of last night, I hope he will meet the doom he deserves. If it had not been for his cutting that rope, Martin would have been alive now.’

‘That is, if the gig reached shore safely.’

‘Of course! The sea was wild, and she might have been swamped, like the lifeboat; still, we must hope for the best.’

‘I seed Bulk a-chuckin’ of that ’ere gent inter the water,’ said Gurt, addressing the air with elaborate indifference.

‘I hope Bulk succeeded,’ replied Crispin grimly; ‘but what’s that?’

A dark object was lying on the white beach, and, as they raced up to it, Crispin gave a cry of anguish.

‘Why, it’s poor Stokins!’ he said, recognising the features of the mate. ‘He was in charge of the boat. I’m afraid she was smashed up like the other.’

‘And ’ere’s Jimson and Bildge,’ cried Gurt, from a distance, where he had discovered two corpses. ‘They’ve all gone t’ kingdom come, gents!’

‘Caliphronas also, I suppose!’ said Maurice sadly; for, in spite of his dislike to the wily Greek, it seemed terrible that his joyous youth should be ended so suddenly by the cruel sea.

‘It looks as if we were the only survivors,’ remarked Crispin moodily, as they resumed their journey. ‘We must have those poor fellows buried. I will speak to Justinian.’

‘Where is Justinian?’ asked Maurice a little irritably. ‘Does he live on this arid peak?’

‘Yes; but do not judge by external appearances. This rocky mountain, so sparsely clothed with trees, is only the uninviting shell of a very fine kernel.’

‘You speak in riddles.’

‘I seem to have been doing that ever since I knew you, judging from your frequent mention of the fact. However, we shall soon come to the tunnel, and then you will see.’

‘What tunnel?’

‘Oh, a wonderful piece of engineering skill carried out by Justinian thirty years ago,—a tunnel which

pierces the side of this mountain, and will admit us us into its interior.'

'Where we shall find—what?'

'The patriarchal community of which Justinian is king!'

'What! does he rule over Troglodytes, like a Norwegian gnome?'

'Gnomes have nothing to do with the south,' said Crispin provokingly. 'I tell you this is the Island of Fantasy—the only fairyland yet remaining on earth. You anticipate the realms of Pluto, but you will find Arcadia.'

'I'm hanged if I understand you!'

'Well, your curiosity will soon be satisfied. *En avant, messieurs*, for I am hungry, and wish to be seated at the hospitable board of Justinian.'

High above, over the terra-cotta coloured cliffs, hung the fresh green foliage which clothed the slopes of the mountain right up to the verge of the eternal snows ;—tall dark cypresses, funereal-looking even in the bright sunshine, the silver-grey glimmer of olive trees, chestnuts, beeches, plane trees, and, nearest to the summit, gloomy pines accentuating the whiteness of the snows, which, clinging to the rocky peak, stood out in cold relief against the warm blue sky. Ahead of

them was a reddish promontory running out into the calm waters, the trees fringing its crest like the mane of some wild animal. Turning round the shoulder of this, they saw in the distance a similar promontory, and between these two headlands a range of vermilion cliffs topped by vegetation, a white sandy beach scattered over with boulders, and a huge arch in the middle of the cliff, which apparently led into the bowels of the mountain.

‘Here we are at the palace gate,’ said Crispin gaily, as he led the way towards the subterranean entrance. ‘We shall soon be in safety.’

Standing in front of this mighty arch, they saw a broad flight of steps leading up into the darkness, so that it looked like the entrance into the hall of Eblis. Without, the brilliant sunshine, the many-coloured land, the sparkling sea ; but within, darkness, dank and unwholesome, which inspired the two strangers with anything but hope. Crispin, however, knowing the place well, sprang lightly up the steps, followed hesitatingly by his companions, but suddenly he stopped and held up his finger, the action being visible in the bright light pouring in through the arch into this artificial cave.

‘Listen ! Maurice, do you recognise that voice ?’

It was a man singing, and his clear high tones echoed in the dark vault overhead, coming nearer and nearer as the vocalist slowly descended the steps.

*'Blow, wind, and swell the sail,
So that my boat may fly—may fly
As a swallow to its nest across the foam.
I am a swallow, and so am flying
To that dear nest of love, which is her heart.
Blow, wind! for I am filled with longing,
Her heart is empty till me she kisses.'*

'Caliphronas!' cried Maurice and Crispin in one breath.

It was indeed Caliphronas who came slowly down the steps and paused in alarm just where the light began to mingle with the darkness;—a new and brilliant Caliphronas, arrayed in all the bravery of the Greek national garb, with gold-broidered leggings, snowy fustanella, gaudy jacket, and red skull-cap. In this picturesque dress he looked handsomer than ever, and had quite recovered his bombastic air, of which terror had deprived him during the storm.

'Crispin! Mr. Maurice!' he cried in a startled voice, placing his hand on one of the pistols stuck in his belt, for he was quite aware that his treachery deserved a warm reception from those whom he had doomed to death.

'You needn't do that,' said Crispin, curling his lip

as he observed the action; 'we are not going to punish you.'

'Punish me!' jeered the Greek, recovering his insolent manner. 'Oh, never fear, I can defend myself. Punish me! and for why? Because I chose to save my own life!'

'Yes, and nearly caused us to lose ours!' said Maurice grimly.

'You know my philosophy, Mr. Maurice; so why expect me to be false to it?'

'You are an infernal scoundrel, Caliphronas!'

The Greek smilingly showed his white teeth, as if a compliment had been paid to him.

'We are all scoundrels more or less, only some are cleverer at concealing it than other people,' he said carelessly. 'So you are all safe? I made sure you were drowned.'

'And wished so too, I daresay,' replied Crispin dryly. 'Well, you see we have survived your amiable intention of leaving us to die. What about the boat?'

'The boat! oh, that was swamped,' said Caliphronas in a satisfied tone. 'Two of your infernal sailors threw me overboard.'

'I seed 'em a chuckin' of yer,' remarked Gurt in a pleasant tone.

‘Did you, indeed? Well, they were very soon chucked themselves, and of the whole twenty in the boat, only half a dozen are alive now.’

‘Where are they?’

‘With Justinian. He sent me to look for your corpses, but I suppose he will be rather astonished when he finds you can still use your own legs.’

‘How did you escape?’

‘I was tossed into the sea near the shore, and, buoyed up by my life-belt, I managed to keep myself afloat till the waves landed me on the beach.’

‘Naught was never in danger,’ quoth Crispin coolly. ‘I suppose all your repentance of yesterday has passed.’

‘Gone to the winds, my friend,’ replied Caliphronas airily. ‘Poof! what would you? There is a time for all things. Yesterday I was nearly dead, and talked nonsense; to-day I am dry and well, so it is evident I am not born to be drowned.’

‘Born to be hanged, more like,’ said Maurice viciously, hardly able to conceal his dislike of this heartless, cowardly, beautiful animal before him. ‘Well, it is cold here, and we are hungry, so I think you had better conduct us to Justinian.’

‘Come, then,’ answered Caliphronas, leading the way. ‘But tell me, how did you escape?’

‘With the help of God!’ said Crispin, resolved not to gratify the Greek’s curiosity.

‘Ah, He helps the sinner as well as the saint; for you see I also am alive and well.’

‘You deserved death for your treachery!’

The mocking laughter of the Count rang through the darkness.

‘Neither virtue nor vice is rewarded in every case! I see you are safe, and the poor good captain is dead.’

‘He is; and you are to blame.’

‘No doubt I shall survive that accusation. Well, you have lost your beautiful ship, Crispin.’

‘It’s my loss, not yours.’

‘Hark to this philosopher! Ha! how can you leave this island again?’

‘What! does Justinian intend to keep us prisoners?’

‘Justinian will do what he thinks fit,’ replied Caliphronas significantly. ‘You are both rich, and can pay large ransoms.’

‘You scoundrel, you have been putting these brigand ideas into the old man’s head.’

Caliphronas laughed disagreeably.

‘Perhaps I have. At all events, if you escape

Justinian, you won't get away so easily from Alcibiades.

'You forget six sailors still survive,' said Maurice sternly, 'and we are three, so I think nine Englishmen can hold their own against a hundred cowards like yourself.'

The Count made a clutch at his pistol, and muttered an execration, but, thinking better of it, recovered his temper, and burst out laughing.

'Well, well, we shall see! I regret, Mr. Maurice, I did not bring a torch for this darkness, but you see I know this passage well, and do not require it. Had I known you three were coming, I would have brought men, torches, food, wine, and all the rest of it, to make you comfortable.'

'Thank you for your hospitality,' retorted Maurice angrily, for the mocking tone of this scamp was intolerable; 'but "*Timeo Danaos*."'

'I don't understand Latin,' said Caliphronas coldly; 'but I've no doubt you've said something uncomplimentary. However, we need not wrangle any more, for here we are at the gate of Melnos.'

The gate was a huge structure of wood, formed by interlacing beams into a kind of barred defence, which completely closed up the tunnel, and in the centre

of this was a small heavy iron door. Through the interstices they could see the faint glimmer of daylight, a still ascending staircase, the red flare of burning torches, and in the doubtful light three or four men moving about.

‘This is to guard against people like my friend Alcibiades,’ said Caliphronas, seeing the amazement of Maurice and Gurt at this mediæval entrance. ‘Like the Pass of Thermopylæ, this tunnel could be defended by four against many, so Melnos is thus a city of refuge.’

‘Ay, if treachery does not gain an entrance,’ retorted Crispin significantly; ‘and that is always possible when there is a traitor within the walls.’

‘Meaning myself?’ rejoined Caliphronas tranquilly. ‘There you are wrong, and I think, my dear Crispin, you must have forgotten that, in or out, I can do nothing, as Justinian alone possesses the key of this door. We must send Alexandros for it. Ola there, Alexandros!’

One of the men, bearing a burning torch, came to the bars of the framework, and Caliphronas spoke to him in Greek, while Crispin, understanding the language thoroughly, listened attentively, as, after the Count’s conduct of last night, he was quite prepared

for further treachery, and desired to guard against it. As soon as Caliphronas finished, the man went off up the staircase, and the Count turned round to his companions with a reassuring smile.

‘He has gone to get the key from Justinian,’ he explained courteously. ‘This key, you must know, Mr. Maurice, is the emblem of sovereignty in Melnos—the sceptre of the island!’

‘But it must be rather a trouble going to Justinian for the key every time you want to get in or out!’

‘There is not much of that,’ said Crispin quickly; ‘the people of Melnos stay at home in the heart of the mountain. ’Tis only wanderers like myself and the Count who are restless.’

‘The heart of the mountain!’ echoed Maurice in a puzzled tone; ‘is it a cavern?’

‘No; fresh air and blue skies.’

‘I cannot understand your Island of Fantasy. It is most perplexing, and well deserves its name.’

‘So Justinian thought, and that is why he called it so.’

‘Who made this ’ere, gents all?’ asked Gurt, who had been surveying his nether world surroundings with much awe.

‘Justinian.’

‘Well, sir, arskin’ yer pardin, but I niver thought a lazy Greek ’ud have had it in him to do sich a thing.’

Caliphronas laughed at the indolent character ascribed to his countrymen, which, however, he could not deny with any great show of reason.

‘Justinian is not a Greek, but an Englishman.’

‘I thought so, sir,’ said Gurt triumphantly; ‘but ’eavins, sir! wot’s he a-doin’ of in this ’ere lay?’

‘Ah, that is a mystery!’ replied the Count, smiling.

‘Blest if ’tain’t all queer,’ muttered Gurt in bewilderment, and thereupon relapsed into silence.

The house of Justinian was evidently some distance away, for they had to wait a considerable time before Alexandros returned, much to the discomfort of the three shipwrecked men, who were beginning to feel their privations keenly. Maurice would have liked to have asked after Helena, but the knowledge that Caliphronas was his rival forbade him to risk an inquiry: He now began to see that the anticipations of Crispin regarding possible dangers were not without some foundation, for, trapped in this mountain’s heart, which appeared to his fancy to be a most extraordinary place, he saw that Justinian could hold them prisoners as long as he pleased.

Besides, this scamp of a Caliphronas, who hated both himself and Crispin thoroughly, was evidently the right hand of Justinian, and thoughts of the cruelties of Greek brigands began to pass unpleasantly through his mind. Here, towards the end of the civilised nineteenth century, was a genuine robber's cave, into which he was blindly walking, and, despite the presence of Crispin, who stood beside him, Maurice did not feel quite at his ease regarding their reception by this renegade Englishman who was called Justinian.

At length rapid steps were heard descending the staircase, and Alexandros came in sight, holding his torch in one hand and the wished-for key in the other. Having unlocked the door, he held it open for them to enter, and, when the four men were inside, locked it carefully again, and thrust the key into his belt in order to take it back to his master. As he did so, he spoke to Caliphronas in Greek, upon which the Count translated the speech for the benefit of Maurice and the seaman.

‘Justinian will see you at the Acropolis.’

‘The Acropolis?’

‘Yes! it is a fancy he has for calling his house so. ’Tis too small for a palace, and too large for an ordinary house, so the intermediate term Acropolis

fits it exactly. Come, Mr. Maurice. Crispin, you know the way, don't you?'

'Considering I have lived all my life in Melnos, I should think it highly probable,' retorted the poet in an annoyed tone, for the patronage of Caliphronas was insufferable.

Conducted by Caliphronas and Alexandros, they walked slowly up the giant staircase, and in a short time arrived at a huge archway similar to the one into which they had entered. Through this Maurice, to his astonishment, saw a smiling landscape, and paused thunderstruck under the great arch.

'Why, Melnos is in the cup of the mountain.'

'Exactly,' replied Crispin, who was enjoying his astonishment. 'Melnos is an extinct volcano, and this is the crater. You see we have plenty of room for buildings, fields, cultivation, and all such desirable things. Here we are two hundred feet above the sea-level.'

Maurice did not reply, being too much amazed for speech, and standing there feasted his eyes on the beautiful picture framed by the archway, of which he was only able to gain a general idea. It was a vision of snowy hills, miniature forests, yellow fields of corn, terraced vineyards, and a mass of white houses in the

hollow, while clinging to the mountain side were other buildings showing white against the pale green of the foliage. High above, encircled by the top rim of the crater, which was broken into a dazzling circle of snow-white peaks, was the blue sky, with the burning sun blazing down into the hollow, wherein, like a mirror, flashed a small lake, encircled by trees. Below, palms waved their feathery fans, above, the light green of the pine trees burned like emeralds in the hot sunshine, and over all this enchanted scene brooded an intense rest, an air of serene calm, which made it seem to Maurice like that sleepy land of the lotos-eaters.

And this was Melnos.



CHAPTER XVII.

AN ISLAND KING.

*Oh, I know naught of the work-a-day world,
This is the land of eternal quiet,
Where I can nestle in indolence curled,
Far from the clamour of modern riot.
Here are my wings of ambition close furled,
For I know naught of the work-a-day world.*

*I am the king of an indolent race,
Working with pleasure, and not with regret,
Never the phantom of Money they chase,
Never they feel in their bosoms a fret ;
Nothing to alter, for all is in place.
I am the king of an indolent race.*



FROM the archway of the tunnel stretched two roads, one to the left, leading down to the valley below by easy gradations, the other to the right, running round the cup of the mountain on a level with the place where they were now standing. Along this latter road they walked, the three gentlemen abreast, and Gurt, considerably bewildered, rolling behind in his nautical way.

Maurice's admiration was strongly excited by the perfection of this road, which was level and broad, being apparently hewn out of the living rock, while the side nearest the valley was bordered by cyclopean masses of dressed stone, and a long line of mulberry trees, now heavily foliated. On the other side also, where the rocks arose steep and smooth, was a corresponding line of trees, so that they walked through a leafy arcade, formed by the meeting of the branches overhead, and their path was chequered with sunlight shadows moving restlessly under their feet, as the wind rustled the leaves above. Through the slim trunks of the trees, set some little distance apart, they caught glimpses of the town below on the verge of the blue lake, its white houses embosomed in trees, and straight streets intersecting each other at right angles, which gave it the appearance of a miniature chess-board. Maurice was in ecstasies over this Eden of the South, and could not express his delight in high enough terms to his companions.

'It is a place to dream in!' he said enthusiastically; 'a land of the lotos! I don't wonder Justinian desires to keep all outside influences away from this paradise. Upon my word, Caliphronas, with such a

beautiful spot as this to dwell in, I do not wonder you were discontented with our grey island of the West. My only astonishment is that you should ever wish to go beyond this enchanted circle of mountains.'

'Oh, it's pretty enough,' said Caliphronas carelessly, casting a glance at the lovely valley below; 'but one grows tired of lovely places, just as one wearies of the most beautiful woman.'

'Every one is not so fickle as you are,' cried Crispin sharply.

'Well, you did not stay in this paradise yourself, Crispin.'

'I was banished from it, and you were the serpent who caused my banishment.'

'Bah! do not lay the blame on me. You ate of the Tree of Knowledge, and wanted to know too much; so Justinian got rid of you.'

'I only wanted to know about myself.'

'Then you never will.'

'Won't I? You forget that I am equal with Justinian now.'

'Are you really?' said Caliphronas mockingly. 'I think not. Justinian has the wisdom of sixty years against your thirty. The half is not equal to the whole.'

‘Well, you have something to gain as well as I,’ flashed out Crispin fiercely; ‘so if I am beaten, you will not be in a much better condition.’

‘Eh! you think so? I have Justinian’s promise, remember.’

‘You have; and if I know anything of Justinian, he’ll break it.’

‘He dare not! Melnos is not impregnable.’

‘Probably not; but you cannot storm it single-handed.’

‘What about my dear Alcibiades?’ sneered the Greek significantly.

Crispin stopped, and looked Caliphronas up and down with scorn.

‘You had better not say any more, Andros, or I may be tempted to tell Justinian of your intentions.’

‘All I say is not meant,’ cried Caliphronas in evident alarm; ‘but Justinian cannot go back from his word about Helena.’

‘Helena!’ said Maurice, who had hitherto kept silence. ‘What about Helena?’

‘Nothing to do with you, sir,’ retorted Caliphronas rudely, and walked on quickly.

‘What does he mean?’ asked Maurice, turning to Crispin with a frown.

‘Nothing more than what I told you on *The Eunice*, when we were off Taygetus.’

‘You told me Caliphronas loved Helena; but this promise’—

‘That has to do with Justinian,’ said Crispin hastily; ‘you must ask him for information. After all, Maurice, you had better wait and see how things turn out before you cross swords with Caliphronas.’

‘Ah! you think, then, we shall cross swords?’

‘I fancy it is extremely probable. This Helena will be an apple of discord, as was her predecessor of Troy. But, however much you two men fight for her, remember it is the lady herself who decides whom she will take.’

‘If she is the woman I judge her to be from her pure face, she will never take that scamp of a Greek.’

‘Oh ho! that is as much as to say she will take you, my Lord Conceit; but never mind Helena just now. We have to get into the good graces of Justinian, or else’—

‘Well?’ asked Maurice, seeing Crispin paused significantly; ‘what will happen?’

‘I can’t tell yet; but, after all, why anticipate evil?’

‘Crispin, you are as ambiguous as a Delphic oracle.’

‘And about as doubtful,’ retorted the poet, laughing. ‘But here we are at the Acropolis.’

‘Well, I’m darned!’ observed Gurt in astonishment; and his exclamation of surprise was certainly pardonable, for no one would have expected to find so splendid a building in this lonely island of the Ægean Sea.

A broad flight of fine-grained red limestone stairs led up to a lofty platform of the same material, this splendid ascent being bordered on both sides by masses of dark green laurel trees, which accentuated the roseate tint of the staircase. On the platform, some distance back, arose a large edifice, somewhat after the model of the Parthenon at Athens, with graceful slender pillars of white marble supporting the weighty entablature, the frieze of which was delicately carved with god-like forms of nude youths, white-draped maidens, severe-faced old men, rearing horses, and seated deities. Above this the pediment, in the centre of which was sculptured a life-size figure of Hephaistos, with his anvil and raised hammer, while the bas-reliefs on either side represented long trains of unclothed men, with their faces turned to the god, and coming towards him with

supplicating hands, as if for the gift of fire. The Pentelican marble of this temple had been toned down by the weather to a delicate amber hue, which contrasted charmingly with the red staircase, the dark laurels, and the faint green of the foliage which clothed the mountain at the back of the building.

‘Justinian never built this!’ cried Maurice, transfixed in amazement at the suave beauty of the whole building; ‘no architects of to-day could have designed such perfection.’

‘No,’ replied Crispin, as they ascended the steps; ‘only this staircase and the platform are modern, for the temple is an old Greek one, built in Heaven knows what year of Hellenic art, and Justinian, finding it in a ruinous condition, restored it as you see. The front was fortunately intact, but he has arranged the interior as a dwelling-house. It is a shrine to Vulcan, and, I presume, was built here because this island is volcanic in character, though indeed it is far away from the Hephæstiades.’

‘I do not wonder Justinian calls it the Acropolis, for it is a magnificent building, and worthy of the name. Oh, Crispin, look at that nude youth struggling with the rearing horse!’

‘You can look at all that another time,’ replied the

poet, laughing at the sculptor's enthusiasm ; ' meanwhile, Justinian is waiting us.'

They entered the great door of the building, followed by the awestruck Gurt, who was too much astonished to speak, and advanced along a lofty hall towards an archway draped with heavy blue curtains. Drawing these aside, they entered into an open court, bordered by ranges of white marble columns, for the temple was hypæthral in character, and the sun shone brightly through the opening of the roof. Between these snow-white pillars hung heavy curtains of azure tint, embroidered with bizarre figures in yellow silk. The pavement was of smooth white marble, and there was a small fountain in the middle, splashing musically into a broad pool which brimmed nearly to the verge of its marble marge. A number of Turkish mats, comfortable modern-looking cane chairs, silk-covered cushions, and dainty bamboo tables were scattered about, and finally, the whole court was one mass of flowers.

Slender palms, bowing their feathery fronds, stood in huge red jars, which added a bright touch of colour to the general whiteness; while there were oblong boxes filled with heterogeneous masses of violets, pansies, golden crocus, anemones, gladioli, and

cyclamen, all glowing in one dazzling blaze of colour. There were also cytusus trees with their bright yellow blossoms, great bushes of roses red with flowers, delicate white lilies springing virgin-like from amid their green leaves, and the pink buds of the gum cistus with its aromatic odours, while between stood the myrtles, sacred to love. All this gorgeous mass of colours was blended skilfully with a prevailing tint of green foliage, and what with the blue curtains, the dazzling white of the pillars and pavement, even under the hot southern sun it did not pain the artistic eye with a sense of incongruous hues, but rather pleased and satisfied it by its bright beauty and variety of hue.

‘What flowers! what flowers!’ cried Maurice, with genuine admiration. ‘Why, this is finer even than the Rector’s rose-garden.’

‘These are Helena’s flowers,’ said Crispin, smiling; ‘she is so fond of them that she ought to be called Chloris. Hush! here is Justinian.’

There was a grating sound of rings being drawn along a rod, and Maurice turned to the left, to see the blue draperies held to one side by an exceptionally tall man, with a long grey beard and keen black eyes, who was dressed in a graceful robe of soft

white wool, falling in classic folds to his feet. Maurice himself was over the ordinary height, but this ancient, holding himself erect as a dart, seemed to tower above him, and, as he moved towards Maurice with outstretched hand, the Englishman involuntarily thought of the Homeric description of Nestor.

‘Mr. Roylands,’ said Justinian, taking the young man’s hand, and looking keenly at him, ‘you are welcome to my island. I am the Demarch of Melnos.’

Behind Justinian came Caliphronas, who looked rather dismayed when he saw the courtesy with which the island king received his guest; and even Crispin made a gesture of surprise, which movement at once drew the old man’s eyes towards him.

‘You also, truant!’ he said, taking the poet’s hand, but without releasing his hold of Maurice; ‘you have come back to Melnos?’

‘Yes, for a purpose,’ said Crispin boldly, evidently not to be duped by the suave greeting of Justinian.

As a flash of lightning leaps from the heart of a dark cloud, so gleamed a glance from Justinian’s dark eyes, and he was evidently about to make some fierce retort to the bold poet, when he restrained

himself with wonderful self-command, and released the hands of both the young men.

‘Before I ask you any questions, gentlemen,’ he said, striking a silver bell that stood on one of the small tables near, ‘I must attend to the rites of hospitality.’

A man made his appearance, and bowed submissively to Justinian.

‘The bath! the meal! for these guests,’ said the old man in tones of command, speaking in Greek. ‘You can attend to Mr. Crispin—tell Georgios to see to the other gentleman. When you are quite refreshed,’ he added in English, turning to his guests, ‘I will speak to you here.’

‘But Gurt?’ said Maurice, pausing a moment.

‘Oh, the sailor!’ observed Justinian, carelessly looking at him; ‘let him follow you, and Anasthasius can look after him. Go now! I will await your return here.’

The young men, astonished at the courtesy of their reception, Crispin being not less so than Maurice, went out with Gurt after the man; and Justinian, flinging himself into a chair, with a deep sigh, covered his face with his hands. Caliphronas, leaning gracefully against one of the pillars, looked

at this exhibition of what he considered weakness with disdain, but did not dare to break upon the reverie of Justinian, of whom he had a wholesome dread. He picked a pink oleander blossom and placed it in his belt, then, after walking about for a few minutes with a frown on his face, sat down on the marble margin of the fountain and began to dabble in the water with his hands. After a time, Justinian looked up with a second sigh.

‘Well, what do you think of him?’ asked the Count in Greek, at the sound of which the old man made a gesture of annoyance.

‘Speak English, you fool! I love to hear my own language.’

‘You will get plenty of it shortly, then,’ said Caliphronas coolly. ‘Nine Englishmen already on the island,—bah! it is a British possession.’

‘You are right, Andros. I am British, and as this island is mine, it is a British possession.’

Caliphronas frowned, as if this view of looking at things was distasteful to him, but, not caring to argue about such a delicate matter, repeated his first remark.

‘Well, what do you think of him?’

‘Maurice Roylands?’

‘Yes.’

Justinian pondered a moment, and was about to reply, when, catching sight of the eager gleam in the Greek’s eyes, he altered his mind at once.

‘I will tell you when I know him better ; I never make up my mind in a hurry. You ought to be aware of that by this time.’

The other, ill-contented with this reticence, would have persisted in his questioning, but the old man, seeing this, shut him up sharply.

‘Be silent, Andros ! I will give you my opinion in my own good time. Meanwhile, mind you treat my guests with all courtesy.’

‘Even Crispin ?’ said Caliphronas, with a sneer.

‘Yes, even Crispin,’ reiterated Justinian in a fiery tone. ‘I have my reasons for acting as I do now. If you dare to disobey my orders, I have a way to silence you.’

Caliphronas turned pale, for he knew that Justinian was absolute ruler of Melnos, while he was thoroughly well hated by the inhabitants, one and all.

‘I have no intention of acting contrary to your desires,’ he replied sulkily, rising to his feet ; ‘but I cannot understand the meaning of your actions. However, I have done what you wished, and Mr.

Maurice is in Melnos. Now, I presume, you will fulfil your part of the bargain.'

'Certainly; you have my permission to pay your addresses to my daughter.'

'And you will make her marry me?' asked Caliphronas eagerly.

The King sprang from his seat with a gesture of anger.

'I will force my daughter in no way!' he roared fiercely. 'I forbade you to think of Helena as a bride, but, provided you brought Roylands here, I gave you permission to woo her. As to forcing her into a marriage with you, there was no question of such a thing.'

'I thought there was,' retorted the Greek, who was white with rage.

'You put your own base construction on my motives. How dare you question me, Andros! Am I master here, or are you? Helena is free to marry you if she wishes; but, so far as I am concerned, I would rather you were drowned in the sea than become my son-in-law.'

The Count went alternately red and white as Justinian spoke, and when the speech was ended tried to answer, but his rage was such that he could

say nothing, so, with a choking cry of anger, he turned on his heel and darted out of the court; while the Demarch, much agitated, walked up and down hurriedly, his white robe sweeping the pavement.

‘What does the boy mean?’ he muttered angrily. ‘I do not like these veiled threats. Melnos is well defended, but I mistrust Andros—he is too friendly with that rascal Alcibiades. Bah! I have no fear—treachery for treachery!—and if Andros dares’—

He paused abruptly, and, raising his hands, shook them impotently at the sky, then resumed his seat with a frown, which boded ill for Caliphronas in the event of any double dealing on his part being discovered. A peacock came walking proudly along the court, with his splendid tail erect, shining like some rich product of the Eastern loom, with its manifold colours, fantastic moons, and iridescent sheen, which flashed gloriously in the sunshine. Evidently irritated at not being noticed, the vain bird uttered a discordant shriek, which had the effect of making his master look up suddenly.

‘Ha, Argos!’ he said, with a sardonic smile; ‘you are like Andros, my friend, fine to look at, and nothing else. But it would be as easy to wring

your neck, with all your bravery, as it would that of my handsome scamp yonder.'

The bird strutted proudly along, the feathers of its neck glistening with every movement of its head.

'You have many eyes, my Argos,' resumed Justinian, after a pause, 'but your human prototype has none at all. He sees no farther than his own straight nose, else he would be more cautious in his deeds, and less daring in his words. It looks as if he were going to dispute my will; well, he can do so, and we shall see who will come off best—Andros or Justinian.'

At this moment Maurice and the poet entered the court, whereupon Argos fled in dismay.

'An omen!' thought Justinian, as he arose to receive them; 'with these I need not fear the machinations of Peacock Andros.'

The two gentlemen, refreshed by their bath and a hearty meal, were now arrayed in loose, flowing robes of white wool, similar to that of Justinian. Crispin wore this antique garb gracefully enough, very evidently used to managing such draperies; but Maurice found them awkward, and as he sat down seemed rather ashamed of the effeminacy of the

dress. The Demarch noticed this, and smiled broadly at the Englishman's want of dexterity.

'You do not like these?' he said, touching his own robe lightly; 'but, believe me, they are very comfortable within doors in this climate. When you go out to look at my island, I will supply you with a less embarrassing dress—more adapted for walking and climbing.'

'I like my legs to be free, sir,' observed Maurice, striving to look at his ease in these long white draperies, whereon Justinian laughed again at this naïve confession.

'Yes; we English are an active race,' he said, leaning back in his chair, 'and like all clothing to be tight and trig; but indoors you will find these flowing robes more adaptable than a shooting suit would be. When one is in the East, one should adopt Eastern customs. For myself, I have become a Sybarite in luxury since dwelling in Melnos.'

'Where is Caliphronas?' asked Crispin, looking about him for the Greek.

'Caliphronas? Oh yes; I forgot his travelling name. A count, is he not, of the Greek Empire? He took a fine name to match his fine feathers. Well, Andros has just left me in a fit of bad temper.'

‘You do not appear to like Andros so much as you did, Justinian.’

The Greco-Englishman smiled significantly.

‘Andros is—Andros,’ he replied dryly, ‘and is anything but reliable. What do you think of my handsome Greek, Mr. Roylands?’

‘I think he is a scamp,’ retorted Maurice briefly.

‘How long did it take you to find that out?’ asked Justinian, without showing any sign of surprise.

‘I did not find it out at all. He confessed his scampishness himself with the most appalling cynicism.’

‘Oh, as far as cynicism goes, Andros might be a boulevardier soaked in absinthe. It is the soul that makes the man, not the surroundings. But never mind this scamp; I wish to hear all about your cruise.’

‘Hasn’t Caliphronas told you?’

‘Caliphronas has told me his version of the story, which is all to his own credit; but those six sailors who are at present in Melnos seemed to disagree with his praises of himself, so I would like to hear what you two gentlemen have to say.’

Whereupon Crispin, being the most fluent of speech, told the whole story, from the time of the Greek’s arrival at Roylands,—narrated the beginning

of the voyage, the arrival in Greek waters, the storm, the loss of the yacht, and the subsequent treachery of Caliphronas. During the recital, Justinian, with compressed lips, listened in silence, only uttering a smothered exclamation of rage when he heard how Caliphronas had cut the rope, and left those on board the yacht to perish.

‘Thank you, Crispin,’ he said, when the poet brought his narrative to a close; ‘your story is worthy of being told by Ulysses at the court of Alcinous. I am glad you escaped the fate intended for you by Andros; but if he had succeeded, I don’t think he would have dared to have shown his face here.’

Crispin glanced at Maurice significantly, and Justinian caught the look with his accustomed keensightedness.

‘I speak for you as well as Mr. Roylands,’ he said quickly. ‘We did not get on well in the past, Crispin, but let us hope we shall be more friendly in the future.’

The poet, considerably astonished at this unwonted emotion of Justinian, accepted the proffered hand of the old man,—although he did so with a somewhat doubtful air.

‘I cannot forget you were kind to me in my youth,

Justinian, and that you brought me up ; but I cannot understand these sentiments, now so different to those you expressed when we last met.'

'You yourself were to blame in the matter, Crispin. Force is of no avail with me, and you came in a rage to demand what I refused to tell you. I have been a wild man in my day, but I am not so absolutely bad as you think me, and it depends upon yourself as to whether I tell you what you wish to learn.'

'I have a right to know!' cried the poet impetuously.

'That I question,' retorted Justinian, with a flash of his keen eyes. 'I will tell you or not entirely at my own pleasure ; but the tone you adopt will not make me answer your questions. The storm cannot break the oak, but the gentlest breeze will make its branches quiver. Lay that parable to heart in your demeanour towards me, Crispin, and all will yet be well ; otherwise—well, you know how you left last time.'

The young man made no reply, but relapsed into moody silence, whereupon Justinian turned to Maurice with a winning smile.

'You must bring this obstinate boy to reason,

Mr. Roylands. Believe me, it is as well we should be all firm friends and allies, as I have reason to believe there will be trouble.'

'From Caliphronas?'

'Exactly. He has made a demand of me which I refuse to grant.'

'About Helena?' said Crispin, suddenly looking up.

'Yes; did he tell you?'

'He said you had made him a promise to give him Helena for his wife, if he carried out your plans.'

'That's a lie!' cried Justinian impetuously. 'I said he could pay his addresses to Helena, but the question of marriage I left entirely in her own hands.'

'Oh,' said Crispin quickly, 'that puts quite a different face on the affair.'

'At all events, Helena will never marry him,' said Maurice abruptly, whereon the King turned on him in surprise.

'What do you know of Helena?'

'Only this,' replied Maurice, handing the portrait of the girl to her father. 'Caliphronas showed me that face, and I fell in love with it.'

'Oh, you fell in love with it!' remarked Justinian in a tone of satisfaction.

‘Yes; in fact, it was that which brought me to Melnos.’

Justinian smiled in a satisfied way, but suddenly frowned.

‘So Andros dared to use this as a lure!’ he muttered in Greek; ‘well, he has succeeded to his own undoing.’

‘I knew you would think so,’ said Crispin, who overheard the speech; ‘as soon as I heard the reason of Andros coming to Roylands, I guessed your intention.’

‘How could you do that?’ asked the old man quickly; ‘you knew nothing.’

‘I know all—Andros told me.’

‘Traitor!’ said Justinian fiercely. ‘Well, Crispin, if you do know, keep your own counsel until such time as I choose to tell my own story.’

‘I promise you.’

‘And in return I will, at my own convenience, tell you what you desire to know about your parentage.’

‘Do this,’ cried Crispin, springing up and clasping Justinian by the hand, ‘and I will be your friend for life!’

‘You had better be my friend for your own

sake,' retorted the Demarch angrily; 'united we stand, divided we fall. Remember, Andros is your and my enemy.'

'And Alcibiades?'

'Alcibiades would like nothing better than an excuse to plunder Melnos. However, we are nine Englishmen, not counting my Greeks, and I think with all we are a match for Andros, Alcibiades, and their brother blackguards.'

This conversation, being carried on in Greek, was quite unintelligible to Maurice, who looked from the one to the other in astonishment. On seeing this, Justinian turned towards him with a courteous apology, and restored the portrait.

'As Andros gave you this, I will not deprive you of it, Mr. Roylands,' he said politely; 'but shortly I hope to present you to the original.'

'Now?' asked Maurice eagerly.

'No; you must go and sleep this afternoon,' replied Justinian authoritatively; 'and you also, Crispin. After your dangers of last night, you must be quite worn out.'

'Well, the bath and a meal have done wonders,' said Crispin, yawning; 'but I must say a few hours' sleep would complete the cure.'

‘And when shall we see Helena?’ demanded Roylands persistently.

‘This evening,’ answered Justinian, taking him by the hand. ‘We must be good friends, Mr. Roylands, for I like your face. Tell me, do you resemble your father or your mother most?’

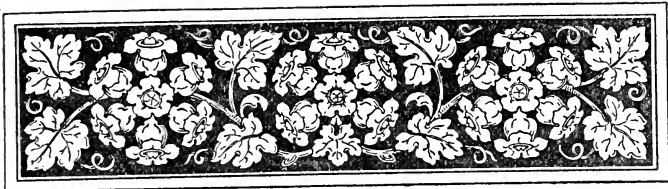
‘My mother,’ said Maurice, rather astonished at this strange question.

Justinian looked at him steadily, then, dropping his hand with a sigh, turned away, as if to conceal some sudden emotion. After a time he recovered himself, and spoke sharply, as if to atone for his faint-heartedness.

‘Come, come, gentlemen, be off to your rooms!’ he said testily; ‘sleep is what you need.’

‘And Helena!’ said Crispin, as he and Maurice left the court.

‘And Helena!’ repeated Justinian in a satisfied tone; ‘yes, this is her husband, not Andros.’



CHAPTER XVIII.

VENUS URANIA.

*To rose-red sky, from rose-red sea,
At rose-red dawn she came,
A fiery rose of earth to be,
And light the dark with flame ;
Then earth and sky triumphantly
Rang loud with man's acclaim.*

*A rose art thou, O goddess fair,
And bloom as men aspire,—
Red rose to those whom passions snare,
White rose to chaste desire ;
Yet red rose wanes with pale despair,
And white rose burns as fire.*



AFTER all that he had come through, Maurice found no difficulty in inducing sleep to come to his pillow. The room he occupied was one of those built by Justinian when he renovated this antique fane, and the walls, floor, and ceiling were of that fine-grained red sandstone of which the staircase was built. The pavement was bare, save for

Turkish rugs scattered here and there, which lack of carpeting made the apartment wonderfully cool and pleasant, but the walls were draped with a heavy kind of woollen tapestry similar to those in the court, saving that the colour was a pale grey, and the embroideries terra-cotta colour to match the floor. A wide window, shaded by Indian beadworked blinds, looked out on to a pleasant prospect of forest which clothed the side of the mountain, and the cool wind, heavy with aromatic scents, stole into the room.

It was also furnished in a somewhat antique fashion, though here and there an anachronism betrayed the nineteenth century, but the couch whereon Maurice rested was purely Greek in design, and lying on this in his white robe, with a purple coverlet flung carelessly over his feet, he might have been taken for some dweller in ancient Athens. True, the moustache on his lip savoured somewhat of the barbarian, but in all other respects the comparison was close enough, for if his features were not quite so classic in outline as those of Caliphronas, they were sufficiently so to pass muster in the carrying out of such fancy.

Lying there with his eyes half closed, the young Englishman in a drowsy fashion felt the balmy odours permeating the warm air, and saw as in a dream the

antique room and the pleasant prospect beyond, which was but mistily seen through the veiling beadwork blind. He was puzzled over the kind reception accorded to him by this strange Justinian, whom he had been led to believe was a kind of modern free-booter. No swarthy, fantastically-dressed, savage marauder was this island king, but a gracious, courteous gentleman, arrayed in the white robe of Socrates, with a winning smile on his face, and polite words on his lips.

Crispin seemed to mistrust him indeed, but even Crispin seemed somewhat astonished at the suavity of his greeting, and now appeared inclined to recant his former dislike of the old man. Maurice longed to have a confidential chat with Crispin, and find out his feelings on the subject, as it was evident that, far from inclining to Caliphronas, their host seemed more disposed to side with them.

Again, Maurice found it difficult to account for the old man's sudden liking for himself, for the satisfaction with which he had received the information that his daughter's face had lured the young Englishman to his island retreat, and for many other things.

‘Mystery, mystery, nothing but mystery!’ said Maurice to himself, as he closed his aching eyes. ‘I

cannot make these folks out ; but, at all events, King Justinian does not seem to disapprove of my passion, and is inclined to give Crispin the information he desires, so I trust all will go well. Sooner or later I will solve all these problems which are now so tantalising ; but, come what may, one good thing is in store for me. I shall see Helena to-night !'

A wave of sleep seemed to roll over his weary brain, now relaxed from the terrible tension of the previous night, and he gradually sank into a deep slumber, with the name of his unseen goddess still on his lips.

Then he dreamed strange dreams of romance, filled with the serenity of Hellenic calm, which floated magically through his brain, and made his slumber delightful with forms of exquisite beauty. He was standing with Helena in the temple of Athena, and together they touched the knees of the undying goddess ; but the face of Helena was veiled, and he could see but vaguely the perfect features which had hitherto been so clear in his dreams. Again, they were wandering like lovers beneath the serene Attic sky, beside the bright, gushing Ilissus, and he strove to kiss her with the kiss of betrothal, but she faded away as did the cloud-Juno in the arms of Ixion, and a voice blown by some faint winds cried, 'Love, but win.'

Then he was on board a galley, putting off from the green shore towards the purple mists of the sea, and Helena was lying in his arms, while the Greek Caliphronas strove fiercely to snatch her from him. Arrows rattled on the shields of his men, the watch-fires blazed on the high mountain-tops, and the air was hot with the flame of battle. In his dream he saw the phantom of himself lay down the cloudy Helena, and dash on the phantom Greek with a mighty sword. A strident cry, a flash as of flame dividing the night, then the phantom Caliphronas vanished, and the galley was sailing, sailing far into the purple night, while, clasped in each other's arms, Helena and himself murmured songs of love, until they melted ghost-like into the misty splendour of the sinking sun.

When he awoke, it was quite dark, and, springing from his couch, he hastily took his watch to the window, and found it was nearly eight o'clock, so his sleep had lasted over six hours. Feeling greatly refreshed by this rest, he bathed his face and hands in cold water, with the intention of going outside into the delicious night air. That the moon was up he could see by the doubtful glimmer of her pale light, but, being behind the house, she could not be seen in her full splendour.

Wondering where he should find Crispin, and whether that gentleman was yet awake, Maurice stole quietly from his room, and, drawing aside the curtains, looked out into the middle court, where he saw a sight which chained him to the earth. Not Paris sitting in judgment on Mount Ida beheld such a vision of loveliness as now appeared to the enraptured eyes of Roylands. The picture—ah, that was but a pale reflection of this rich, ripe, glowing beauty! Venus, the goddess of love herself, yet with a touch of the chaste purity of Artemis—not Venus Pandemos, with flushed face and wanton glance, but Venus Urania, chaste, cold, pure, and serene as the moon-huntress herself.

The moon, hanging like a great silver sphere in the darkly blue sky, shone serenely through the hypæthral opening of the court, and in her pale light the ranges of white columns glimmered like faint ghosts in the doubtful gloom.

Like a silver rod the fountain's jet shot up to meet her kiss, and the splashed waters of the pool trembled restlessly with faint flashes within the marble marge. The cold, sweet odours of the flowers made the night air drowsy with their perfumes, and a distant nightingale began to trill deliciously in the still beauty of

the evening. But the onlooker saw not the moon, the fountain, nor the solemn range of pillars ; he had no ears for the liquid notes of the unseen bird ; for his eyes were fixed in an enamoured gaze on a tall, beautiful woman, who stood with upturned face gazing at the sky.

In that tremulous light she looked more than mortal in her spiritual loveliness—some goddess of ancient Hellas once more visiting the dear-loved islands of the *Ægean*—perchance *Aphrodite* herself, haunting the fane of her husband *Hephaistos*. To add to the plausibility of this fantastic idea, this girl was draped in the long white *chiton* of antique times, and her golden hair, dressed after the fashion of the *Venus of Cnidos*, was bound with triple bands of silver, while her slender arms, bare to the shoulder, were devoid of any ornament. So fair, so pure, so ethereal she appeared, that *Maurice* might well be pardoned for deeming her some pale sweet spirit of classic times, haunting the scenes of her former life, and listening, as she had done in the past, to the golden notes of the divine nightingale, thrilling to ecstasy the heart of the dusk.

For a few minutes *Maurice* stood spellbound in the contemplation of this lovely incarnation of *Venus*

Urania, then inadvertently made a movement which caused the girl to start from her rapt attitude, and look in his direction. Being thus discovered, he came forward to meet the awakened divinity, looking himself, in his sweeping robe, like some young disciple of Plato or Parmenides. To his surprise and delight, this beautiful woman, with a smile on her exquisite face, came forward to meet him half-way with outstretched hands.

‘You are Mr. Roylands,’ she said in English, with a delicate sweetness in her voice that seemed to shame the notes of the nightingale, at least, so Maurice thought; but then, in his amazement, he was scarcely capable of cool reflection.

‘Yes, I am Maurice Roylands,’ he replied, taking both her outstretched hands within his own; ‘and you are Helena.’

‘I am Helena,’ she repeated gravely, drawing him a little to the left, so that the moonlight fell on his face. ‘You can have no idea how anxious I was to see you, Mr. Roylands. I do so love to see one of my countrymen.’

‘Are you English?’

‘Yes,’ said Helena proudly, dropping his hands, much to his regret; ‘my father is English, and I also,

although my mother was a Greek. Still, I have spoken your language all my life, and have been brought up like an English girl, so I must be English.'

She spoke in a tone of such conviction that Maurice began to laugh, in which merriment she joined freely.

'My father would not tell me anything about you,' she resumed gaily; 'and as you are the first Englishman that has come to Melnos, I was anxious to see what you were like.'

'I hope your anxiety has been repaid,' observed Maurice, with a smile.

'Oh, indeed it has. You are very good-looking, especially when you smile.'

Roylands was rather taken aback by this naïveté, and, being unaccustomed to such direct compliments, blushed like a girl, much to the amusement of Helena, who stood looking at him with clear, truthful eyes.

'Do you not like me saying that?' she observed innocently. 'Andros always likes to be told he's good-looking.'

'Well, I am not so conceited as Andros—at least, I trust I am not,' answered Maurice, quite touched by her rustic innocence; 'but, you know, ladies in England do not speak so—so—very plainly.'

‘Do they not? Why, do they tell their friends they are ugly?’

Maurice roared in spite of her presence, upon which she looked at him rather reproachfully.

‘It is too bad of you to laugh at me, Mr. Roylands,’ she said pettishly; ‘you can’t expect me to be like an English lady after living all my life at Melnos.’

‘You are much more charming than any English lady I know.’

A charming smile dimpled the corners of her mouth.

‘Really! Ah, I see it is the custom for the gentlemen to pay compliments to the ladies, not the other way about. I must not tell you, you are good-looking, but it is quite proper for you to say I am charming.’

‘Well—that is—really, you know, I hardly know what to say,’ said Maurice, finding himself somewhat in a dilemma. ‘The fact is, neither English men nor women pay each other compliments at all—at least, it’s not supposed to be good form.’

‘What is good form?’ asked Helena innocently.

‘I must undertake your education, Miss Justinian.’

‘I am not Miss Justinian. You must call me Helena.’

‘Oh, is that so? then you must know, Helena, I am not Mr. Roylands—you must call me Maurice.’

‘Maurice! Maurice! Ah, that is much nicer to say than Mr. Roylands. Yes, I will call you Maurice. I like Maurice,’ she continued reflectively; ‘yes, I like Maurice.’

‘I am very glad you like me,’ he said artfully.

‘Oh, I mean the name,’ replied Helena, laughing at what she thought was his mistake. ‘But tell me, Maurice, do you now feel quite well?’

‘Yes, thank you. The sleep of this afternoon has quite cured my fatigues of last night.’

‘Oh, it must have been terrible!’ said Helena, with a shudder; ‘papa told me all about it. I was so glad when Andros told us of your safety.’

‘My safety, or that of Crispin?’

‘I was glad for both your sakes, and indeed I am very fond of Crispin. You know, we are just like brother and sister.’

‘Are you? Well, shall we be brother and sister?’

‘Oh yes,’ she answered, frankly putting her hand into his; ‘I shall be very glad to have another brother.’

Maurice felt a trifle disappointed at this calm acquiescence in his audacious proposal, but, finding her little hand within his own, clasped it warmly;

whereupon she suddenly seemed to feel a touch of maiden modesty, and withdrew her hand, blushing shyly. Certainly she was the most ingenuous, delightful woman in the world, and Maurice was quite fascinated by this timid audacity, which was so different from the artificial modesty of many girls he had met. She was Undine without a soul, she did not know the meaning of life in any way whatsoever, yet, like some gentle wild thing, she started back with an instinct of caution when his touch thrilled her virgin soul with a deeper feeling than friendship. Both of them felt tongue-tied and awkward, Helena at the strange, unexpected feeling which made her heart beat and her cheek burn, Maurice with regret for having even unconsciously permitted his touch to convey anything further than the brotherly friendship of a man for a pure woman.

Fortunately for them both, Crispin, alert and cheery, entered the court with Justinian, and they came towards the couple with careless unconsciousness. Justinian, indeed, did cast a rapid glance at the flushed faces of the pair, which betrayed their late emotion, but, far from being angry, an imperceptible smile passed over his lips, as if he were quite satisfied that this should be so.

‘Helena!’ said Crispin, coming forward and kissing her hand; ‘I am so delighted to see you again! You are more lovely than ever.’

‘Maurice says English gentlemen do not pay ladies compliments.’

‘Don’t they?’ answered Crispin humorously. ‘My dear Maurice, that storm last night must have destroyed your memory. So you two have met?’

‘Quite unexpectedly,’ declared Maurice hastily. ‘I came to look for you, Crispin, and, glancing into this court, I saw Helena, so we have been talking ever since.’

‘And Maurice has been telling me about England,’ said Helena, clapping her hands together with a burst of girlish laughter, delicious as the carol of a thrush.

‘Maurice! Helena!’ repeated Justinian, smiling. ‘Really you young people are getting on very well together.’

‘Your daughter had some difficulty in saying Roylands,’ said Maurice apologetically.

‘And you do not know Helena’s other name, eh?’

‘What is her other name, sir? If you don’t like me to call her Helena, shall I say Miss’—

‘You can say Helena,’ answered Justinian shortly; ‘she has no other name.’

‘No; we are simple people here,’ observed Crispin

mischievously, 'and dispense with such cumbersomeness as two names;—Justinian, Helena, Crispin, Andros; so you, Roylands, will drop your harsh English surname, and be henceforth known as Maurice.'

'I am quite content to be so as long as Helena speaks the name!'

'Another compliment!' laughed Crispin gaily; 'I thought, according to you, gentlemen never paid ladies compliments?'

'This is the exception to prove the rule.'

'Helena,' said her father suddenly, 'where is Andros?'

'I do not know. He was here an hour ago, and said he would be back to supper.'

'It is supper-time now,' said Justinian, moving towards the side entrance. 'You must be hungry, gentlemen. I trust you feel quite recovered?'

'Speaking for myself, I do,' answered Maurice brightly; 'that sleep has quite set me up. And Crispin'—

'Subscribes to all you have said, and feels as hungry as a hunter.'

'Hark! there is Andros,' observed Helena, placing one white finger on her lips, in which attitude she

looked like some exquisite statue of Silence; 'do you hear him singing?'

*'The rose is shedding its crimson leaves,
Sadly they fall at the caress of Zephyrus;
And I, O beloved, shed tears in plenty,
Feeling thy kiss on my mouth;
For I must lose thee—ah, I must lose thee!
Another richer than I desires to wed thee,
Therefore do I shed tears, as the rose sheds her crimson petals.'*

'An omen!' breathed Justinian under his breath, as the Greek drew aside the curtain of the main entrance; 'he will not marry Helena!'

Against the dark draperies veiling the archway the slender figure of the handsome Greek stood out in bold relief. He also had assumed a robe of white, and, with his clear-cut features and graceful pose, looked the incarnation of that delicate Greek adolescence whereof Pindar sings in his Olympian Odes. As he caught sight of Maurice standing near Helena, he frowned perceptibly, and advanced hastily, as if to come between them, but, meeting the keen, significant look of Justinian, he faltered in his hasty step, and broke into a charming smile.

'Are you waiting for me?' he said cheerfully, as they all went to have supper. 'I have been down in the valley speaking to your sailors.'

'Are they all right?' asked Crispin anxiously, for

carelessly gay though he seemed to be, he was terribly disturbed at the loss of so many lives in the storm.

‘Oh, they are quite happy. All your subjects, Justinian, are making heroes of them, especially the women, much to the dismay of the men of Melnos.’

‘I hope they won’t be getting into trouble,’ said Justinian, with a frown. ‘I want no quarrels here.’

‘Then you had better go and see about them tomorrow, for if this hero-worship goes on, trouble there certainly will be.’

‘And doubtless you would be very glad to see such trouble,’ thought Justinian to himself, as he eyed Caliphronas with a doubtful face. ‘I must lose no time in putting things to rights. Trouble at this juncture would play into your hands, my friend.’

They were a very merry party that night, as even Caliphronas seemed to forget all his jealous feelings with regard to Maurice, and lay himself out to be entertaining. The stern face of Justinian relaxed, and Helena, full of girlish glee, was evidently quite charmed with this handsome Englishman who had arrived so unexpectedly in Melnos. As for Crispin, he was very happy, for he now began to hope that Justinian would tell him all he wanted to know, and thus sweep away all obstacles to his union with

Eunice. In fact, one and all laid aside their secret cares and plans to indulge in light-hearted merriment at the simple meal. Simple it was in every way, and yet infinitely charming, consisting as it did of goat flesh, white bread, golden honey, fresh cheese ; and for drink, that strong resinous Greek wine, which Maurice found so rich for his palate, that he was fain to follow the temperate example of Caliphronas, and mingle it with water.

After supper they all went out into the court, and, with the exception of Caliphronas, began to smoke Turkish tobacco provided by Justinian, who was rather proud of his Latakia, while Helena, seating herself on the marge of the fountain, joined gaily in the trifling conversation in which all indulged out of sheer light-heartedness.

At the end of the court a charcoal fire burned in a kind of tripod, and, perfumes being cast thereon, a thick white smoke ascended like incense to the clear sky. Near this stood Caliphronas, and the red light streaming on his statuesque face, his white garb, made him a very striking figure. The other gentlemen were seated decorously in chairs, and the moon streaming down on their snowy robes, on the exquisite upturned face of Helena, produced an effect quite antipathetical

to their excessively modern conversation. Pale moon, glittering stars, solemn court, soaring incense ;—they should have been a company of philosophers talking of the destiny of the soul, of the sacred festivals, and unseen deities ; but, by the law of contrast, they talked nothing but frivolity, and laughed at their own light badinage ; Helena's girlish laugh ringing clear above the deep tones of the men.

‘I was wrong,’ said Maurice to himself, as he watched this perfect girlish picture ; ‘she is not Venus, but Nausicaa, and I am a modern Ulysses at the court of Alcinous.’

‘Are you worshipping at the altar of Vulcan, Caliphronas?’ called out Crispin to the Greek, who stood almost veiled in the clouds of incense.

‘No,’ said Caliphronas, walking forward in his stately fashion ; ‘I have no love for the swarthy god of the Cyclops. For me, Venus.’

‘Pandemos!’

‘Or Urania, I care not which, provided the goddess is herself,’ replied the Greek coolly. ‘Ah, we all worship those old pagan gods, who were but the incarnation of our own desires. You, Crispin, bow to Apollo ; Mr. Maurice, you adore the Muse of Sculpture, of whose name I am ignorant ; and Justinian

loves the supreme Zeus, who gives power and dominion.'

'And I?' asked Helena gaily; 'whom do I worship, Andros?'

'The inviolate Artemis!'

'There's a good deal of truth in what you say,' observed Justinian serenely; 'but I should have thought your deity was Hermes.'

The remark was so pointed that Caliphronas winced, but at once smiled gaily and replied in the same vein—

'Venus and Hermes—Love and Trickery! Well doubtless the one helps the other.'

'Such aid is not always effectual,' said Justinian significantly, whereat the Greek shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply.

'Well, for my part,' observed Helena reflectively, 'I do not worship Artemis so much as I do Demeter. There is something grand about the earth goddess who causes the earth to break into the glory of flowers.'

'I think she must have been here,' said Maurice, looking round at the profusion of flowers.

'Ah, these are all my treasures, Maurice. I adore flowers, and there is not a nook in Melnos where I have not hunted for blossoms. Yes, even up to the

verge of the snows, where grow tiny saxifragas. Wait till you see our harvest—our vintage—then you will see Mother Demeter in her glory.’

‘Do you celebrate those festivals?’

‘Yes,’ said Justinian quickly; ‘I keep up all the old Greek customs, though, of course, I adapt them to the needs of my people. The Bacchanalia of Melnos do not include the debauchery of Athens, nor are the Anthesphoria anything more than innocent flower festivals.’

‘In honour of Proserpine,’ exclaimed Helena gaily. ‘Crispin, do you remember the Flower Hymn to Demeter you wrote long ago?’

‘Yes, very well; but I am afraid my poems were very bad in those days. Can you remember it?’

‘Of course; but not in Greek, in English. I translated it myself.’

‘Sing it, Helena,’ said her father, and his request was eagerly seconded by the whole company, especially by Maurice, who was anxious to hear a voice which he was sure would outvie the nightingale.

Helena clasped her hands round her knees, and, lifting up her face to the stars, began to sing in a clear, sweet voice, which, though entirely untrained, had a thrill in it like the liquid notes of a bird—

I.

*Wild roses red as dawn
When nymphs awaken,
Frail lilies white and wan
As love forsaken,
With primrose pale and daffodil,
Forget-me-nots from hidden rill,
And blossoms shaken
By wintry breezes thin and chill,
From orchards on the distant hill,
With flowerets richer, rarer still,
From thy breast taken,—*

II.

*Brave marigolds who in the fields
Outstay the swallow,
And flowers of Sol whose burning shields
Do dare Apollo,
With pansies dark as honeyed wine,
And reeds beloved by Pan divine
For pipings hollow,
Wild olive, laurel, scented pine,
All these I offer at thy shrine,
If thou wilt smile on me and mine,
And blessings follow.*

When her sweet voice died away, an emulous nightingale began to sing as if in rivalry, and Helena burst out into girlish laughter.

‘Do you like my translation, Crispin?’

‘It is charming—much better than the words.’

‘No, indeed!’ contradicted Maurice, who was enchanted with the song and the singer; ‘as Wordsworth say, it is a very pretty piece of paganism.’

‘Oh, that faint praise is worse than blame.’

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said Justinian, rising from his seat, ‘I am going to retire to rest, as I cannot do without my sleep. Old age is not like youth, you know. Helena!’

‘I am going, father,’ she cried, springing to her feet. ‘Good-night, Andros—Crispin! good-night, Maurice!’

“‘Good-night, and sweet dreams be thine,’” murmured Maurice from some poet.

Their departure was a sign of breaking up, for Caliphronas, not feeling inclined for a conversation with two men he disliked so much, went off immediately; and after they had finished a last pipe, Maurice and Crispin sought their repose.

‘Well,’ said Crispin, as they parted, ‘what do you think of Helena?’

‘Think of her!’ echoed Maurice in an indescribable tone. ‘That she is simply perfection, far above what you told me. If your poetry is not better than your description, Crispin, it must be poor stuff.’

‘You are bewitched, Maurice. Beware the spells of Circe.’

‘Circe! No! she is no malignant enchantress, but a beautiful girlish angel.’

‘Nausicaa!’ said Crispin gaily, and went off to bed.



CHAPTER XIX.

A MODERN ARCADIA.

Courage, my poet!

The age of iron is not yet supreme,

*For youth still throbs in the old veins of Mother Earth, wan
and weary with sorrowful centuries.*

*Tho' girdled our world by wires multitudinous transmitting the
swift message of electricity;*

*Tho' the straight and curved lines of the railway run parallel
along the immensity of continents for the advancement of
culture;*

*Tho' ships, steam-driven, even against storms, plough the waters
of perilous oceans;—*

Yet somewhere beyond the confines of our selfish civilisation

*There lies an Arcadia among the lone mountains, or perchance
encircled by tideless seas,*

*Wherein dwell delicate beings who know not ambition or avarice,
And work but for bread—for bread alone, tempering such toil
with singing melodious, and merry pipings at sundown.*

Therefore, courage, my poet!



HEY were early risers in Melnos, for in that invigorating climate it was impossible, even for the most indolent, to lie sluggishly in bed, and the sun was hardly above the eastern horizon,

before Justinian, his household and guests, were seated at breakfast. Helena was not present, having already gone out into the deliciously fresh morning air on some expedition connected with flowers ; so the meal was a strictly masculine one, and the four men made their plans for the day. Crispin and Caliphronas decided to remain at the Acropolis, as they were already well acquainted with the lions of the island, the one to write letters, the other to await the return of Helena, over whose movements he kept watch with all the jealous solicitude of a doubtful lover ; and Maurice, in company of Justinian, went down to the valley, in order that the Englishman might be shown all the wonders of this unique place.

The white indoor robes of the previous evening were now discarded in favour of a serviceable costume similar to that worn by the rough Cretan mountaineers, — long boots of brown leather, loose blue trousers thrust therein at the knees, a red sash, white shirt of wool, and blue jackets, together with a flowing capote and hood to cover the head when the sun grew unpleasantly strong. Justinian wore a red fisherman's cap with a gold tassel on his white locks, but Maurice was supplied with a large grey felt sombrero, the shade of which was very grateful. The island king

looked truly regal in this picturesque dress, with his long grey beard, his sun-tanned skin, fierce black eyes, and reverend locks; lithe and active as a young man, he carried his burden of sixty-five years with the greatest of ease, and as he walked beside Maurice, with a light springy step, the sculptor began to think that his companion must have discovered the secret of perpetual youth.

They walked leisurely along the mulberry avenue, in the direction of the entrance to the tunnel, and enjoyed the exquisite coolness of the morning, for the sun was not yet over the shoulder of the mountain, and the cup was still in comparative shadow. Notwithstanding this, however, the air was warm, and balmy with the scent of aromatic herbs, which delightful temperature rather puzzled Maurice, as it did not agree with the marked absence of sunlight for a greater part of the morning, and he mentioned this to Justinian.

‘Certainly we do not get much of the sun in the morning owing to the mountain,’ answered the old man, stroking his silver beard; ‘but in the middle of the day, and most of the afternoon, his beams are very powerful, for at noon he is right above our heads, and the western side of the Melnos Peak is so low, that until near sunset his rays stream on the valley.’

He pointed to the west, and Maurice saw that the high peaks fell away into a kind of low semicircle, which enabled them, from their position, to catch a glimpse of blue sea and distant island. On each side of this gap, however, the jagged summits stood up stern, rigid, and snow-clad against the delicately blue sky, girdling the valley at the same height all round, save at the western side before mentioned.

‘Still,’ said Maurice pertinently, ‘the sun is even now below the eastern side of the mountain, yet the air is quite warm.’

‘Cannot the temple to Hephaistos solve the riddle?’

‘Oh, you mean that the island is volcanic!’

‘Yes; this is the crater of an extinct volcano, extinct for thousands of years, for even when the temple was built, the fires must have died out, or its builders could hardly have placed it on the inner side of the crater. It is the volcanic character of Melnos that makes it so warm and fertile. You see the slopes are covered with corn, vine, olive, in profusion, while dates, lemons, orange trees, citrons, and all such delicate plants grow wild without cultivation. This valley is the veritable Horn of Plenty so lauded by the Hellenes.’

‘If we are to believe the ancient historians,’ said

Maurice gravely, as he looked at the fertile sides of the mountain so admirably cultivated, 'this was also the case with the crater of Vesuvius, yet it proved to be still active.'

'What! do you think Melnos will break out again?' observed Justinian, with a shade of thought on his fine face. 'Indeed we have earthquakes occasionally, but not much to speak of. I fancy the islands of the north are more of a volcanic centre than these; still the volcano may break out again—in that case I am afraid all my work will go for nothing.'

'Is this island entirely your work?'

'Every bit of it,' answered the old man emphatically. 'Forty years ago, I came into these waters to look for this extinct volcanic island, of which I had received full information from a wandering Greek, who knew Melnos well. I duly sighted it, and, having landed, I climbed up to the summit, when I discovered this enchanting valley, also the Temple of Hephaistos still in a tolerably good state of preservation. I had left England smarting under a sense of injury, from—from—well, it was about a woman; and I swore never to return to it. Always of an uncivilised disposition, I determined to fix my home here, and, being possessed of plenty of money, I bought this island

from the Turkish Government at a pretty heavy price. They were anxious for money, especially as it was after the Greek War of Independence, which had emptied the coffers of the Sublime Porte ; besides which, the Ottomans did not care about this barren rock, which was of no use to them in any way ; so I bought it, and settled in the old temple, where I have now dwelt for forty long years.'

'But this community—the tunnel?'

'All my works ! I have, so to speak, carried out the projects of Goethe's Faust. Ah, you are astonished at my referring to that, but I am a University man, Mr. Roylands, and have not yet forgotten my learning. *Et ego in Arcadia fui*, and know the ancient colleges of Cambridge, the oozy Cam, and the delights of a town and gown row.'

'You have had a strange career.'

'A very happy one at all events. It was fortunate my superabundant energy found vent in the direction of making this island blossom like a rose, otherwise I should have remained a restless adventurer to the end of my days. I could not settle down to the placid life of an English gentleman ; I wanted room to breathe, opportunities for daring, work—gigantic work—to do ; and I found them all in Melnos.'

‘You have carried out your self-imposed task nobly.’

‘I am glad you think so. Yes ; I trust I have been of some use in my generation. And, at all events, I have erected one thoroughly happy, peaceful spot,—a modern Eden,—and that is no easy thing to do in this riotous century.’

‘It is a modern miracle!’

And it was little else, seeing that all these gigantic works had been planned and carried out by a solitary human being ; for by this time they were at the entrance to the tunnel, and as Maurice looked down the enormous flights of red limestone steps, which led to the valley below, he was truly amazed at the engineering science displayed by the man beside him. Flight after flight, now to right, now to left, stretched down the gentle slope of the mountain, and these mighty stairs were all carefully finished with heavy balustrades of the same material, neatly joined together. At certain platforms, statues of white marble, pedestaled on red blocks, stood up in proud beauty, and, seeing his guest’s eyes fixed on these heroic forms, Justinian laughed.

‘I am a bit of an antiquarian, Mr. Roylands,’ he explained as they descended, ‘and all over these

islands I pay men to dig among ancient ruins for statues, which I do my best to restore, and then place here. This Apollo, for instance,' he said, as they paused before a life-size nude figure holding a lyre, 'was found at Delos and brought to me. True, the Greek Government claim all these things, but I do not see why I should not secure them if possible, and I am sure they look better in this enchanted valley than in some stuffy museum.'

Maurice, with sculptor-like enthusiasm, would fain have lingered before this masterpiece of Greek art, but Justinian hurried him impatiently away.

'You will have plenty of time to look at them again,' he said, as they resumed their descent, 'but at present I have plenty to show you. I am glad you like my staircase.'

'It is wonderful, but I think the tunnel is still more so.'

'Yes ; it is a fine piece of engineering,' said Justinian complacently. 'You see it was impossible to constantly climb up over the peaks, which involved waste of time, and a weary ascent, so I got an engineer from England, supplied him with plenty of Greeks, and they finished that tunnel in five years. I am very proud of it, I assure you.'

‘What about the gate in the middle of it?’

‘That is absolutely necessary, not so much now as formerly, but forty years ago the Ægean was very lawless, and the Government could not put down the pirates. Of course, hearing a rich Englishman had bought Melnos, these rascals thought it contained all kinds of treasures, and have made frequent assaults on it. Fortunately I have always managed to beat them off. I think the rascals have a wholesome dread of me now,’ finished the old man grimly.

‘Now I suppose there is no danger of any attack being made.’

‘I am not so sure about that. King George’s Government is more feared by these scamps than was King Otho’s; but, though the majority of them have disappeared, there are still some left who would like to storm Melnos.’

‘Alcibiades?’

‘What do you know of Alcibiades?’ asked Justinian sharply.

‘Nothing more than that he is an equivocal character. Caliphronas told me so much.’

‘Andros! Yes, he is far too friendly with that scamp of an Alcibiades, who is an excessively dangerous man. I do not trust Andros, and he

knows it; so, out of sheer anger, he may urge Alcibiades to assault the island. An enemy without, a traitor within—it is very dangerous.’

‘If you distrust Caliphronas, why don’t you turn him out?’

‘I have no proof against him yet, but I fancy he has some scheme in his mind. Believe me, Mr. Roylands, if you have a stomach for fighting, I fancy there will be plenty of opportunity for you to indulge in it shortly.’

‘Oh, as for that, I should like nothing better!’

‘I like that,’ said Justinian decisively; ‘you are a true Roylands!’

‘I trust so. But how do you know the Roylands are a fighting family?’

‘All Englishmen fight, more or less,’ answered Justinian carelessly; ‘besides, your name is a Norman one, and descendants of William the Conqueror’s vassals are always soldiers. Hitherto you have led a quiet and peaceful life, but if we do have an island war, I don’t think you will be the last to help me to defend my kingdom.’

‘You can rely on that—nor Crispin either!’

‘Oh, Crispin!’ replied Justinian, a trifle disdainfully; ‘he is too much a man of peace for my fancy. But here we are at the village.’

‘By the way, how did you populate this new Rome of yours?’

‘Oh, in the old days I was rather a celebrity in the islands,—a kind of insular Lord Byron,—and of course had my followers. When I settled here, I made all my followers come also, and admitted none but young men. They brought their sweethearts and wives, so gradually the community grew up here. Recruits come from time to time, but I admit none but those who are physically perfect and passably moral. We now number, with women and children, two hundred souls, and you will not find a deformed or lame person among the lot.’

‘Then you have no old people?’

‘Oh yes. I am old myself, and many of my followers are of the same age. We were all young men in those days of colonisation, but now age has come upon us, as you see. Some of my old comrades have died, but many are well and hearty, thanks to the salubrity of this climate. They are the sages of the village.’

‘Local rulers, I suppose?’

‘No,’ retorted Justinian, with fiery earnestness; ‘there is only one ruler in Melnos—myself.’

They were now walking down the principal street of the village, a broad thoroughfare, running between

two rows of red limestone houses, from the foot of the grand staircase to the blue lake, the distance in all being about a quarter of a mile. On each side, between the pathways and the road itself, ran two lines of elm trees, the foliage of which formed a pleasant shade, while the houses, built in a tropical fashion, with wide verandahs, were gay with flowers. Helena had evidently inoculated her father's subjects with a love for flowers, as on every side the eye was dazzled with a profusion of bright tints. At the lower end of the street was a wide semicircle, facing the lake, and planted with lines of beech, elm, and plane trees, while in the middle of this pleasantness stood a tall pedestal of white marble, bearing a huge bronze Zeus, seated half-draped, with thunderbolt and eagle beside him. Indeed, the statues of gods and goddesses were so frequent, that Maurice began to think his eccentric host, in order to complete his revival of ancient Athens, had re-established the hierarchy of Olympus, with himself as Pontifex Maximus. Evidently his face betrayed his thoughts, for, seeing his eyes fixed on the garlands decorating the base of the statue, the King laughed in an amused manner.

‘No, no, Mr. Roylands, we are not pagans, in spite of the presence of the gods,’ he said, with a smile.

‘All my people belong to the Orthodox Church, and we have a priest, a sacred building, and everything necessary for such religion.’

‘Are you also of the Greek Church?’

‘No, I am no renegade,’ replied Justinian haughtily ; ‘but, at the same time, I am not what you would call a Christian.’

‘But I trust your religious principles are not those of Caliphronas?’

‘No ; I believe in working for the good of others, as you can see. Morally speaking, I am what you call an agnostic, though truly I believe in a supreme power. I erect my altar to ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ, Mr. Roylands, and strive to propitiate him by helping my fellow-creatures.’

The conversation now becoming rather delicate in its trenching on religious beliefs, Maurice turned it dexterously by remarking on the number of mulberry trees.

‘Those are for the silkworms,’ explained Justinian, striking the trunk of one of these trees with his staff ; ‘we export a great number of cocoons, and do a large trade with the mainland. We also weave silks for ourselves ; the factory is to the right.’

There were a great number of people in the streets,

all in a similar dress to their own—that is, the men, for the women were mostly arrayed in the graceful Greek dress of the Cretans, which consisted of full white trousers reaching to the ankle, brightly-coloured tunics, embroidered jackets, gaudy handkerchiefs twisted round the head, and long white veils, though the latter were but assumed for festive occasions. Both men and women were very fine-looking, with oval faces, olive skins, somewhat pointed chins, and aquiline noses, and their gait was remarkably graceful, with the stately bearing of a free race. The adults all saluted Justinian respectfully, and he acknowledged their greetings with haughty condescension, although he unbent somewhat towards the children, who crowded round him with cries of ‘Kalli imera Kyrion!’

‘You are as populous as a hive of bees,’ said Maurice, as they walked down to the lake; ‘soon the island will be too small.’

‘Not for many years, I hope and trust,’ answered Justinian, casting a look round at the now sunny sides of the mountain, which encircled them like a cup. ‘There is plenty of room yet; for my colony, in spite of its forty years, is only yet in its infancy. Lots of room yonder for dwellings; the soil is fertile,

and affords plenty of food ; and as to necessaries from the outside world, we export olives, cocoons, silks, wine, and dittany, receiving in return what we require from more advanced civilisation.'

'Dittany! what is that?'

'I am afraid you don't know your Virgil, Mr. Roylands. Dittany is an herb of rare medicinal power, which is found in Crete, and also in Melnos. It is excellent for illness of all kinds, especially fevers, and is as valued now as it was in the days of Pliny. Plenty of it up in the mountains yonder, as the goats are very fond of it.'

'Have you goats?'

'Of course! and also sheep, though I am afraid the goats are the most numerous. Indeed, I have imported here some of the rare Cretan breed—a kind of ibex, which grows to a great size. These, of course, I will not allow to be killed; but for food we have plenty of the smaller wild goats, such as exist in many places in Greece, particularly on the summits of Olympus. You probably forget we had goat's flesh for supper last night.'

'And the lake, sir?'

'Artificial purely.'

'Sea water?'

‘Oh dear, no. The level of this valley is considerably above that of the sea. I should be sorry were it otherwise, as, if we were lower, we might run a chance of being swamped by the influx of waters. I am sure Alcibiades and his friends would be delighted to drown us like rats if they could. This lake comes from the snows yonder.’

‘The snows?’

‘Precisely. I have had a reservoir constructed far below the snow-line, and a shoot into it from the summit of the mountain. At certain intervals I send men up, who detach great masses of snow and send them down the shoot into the reservoir. There the heat of the sun soon melts them to water, and from thence the water is taken down to the lake.’

‘But water always rises to its own level.’

‘Hence you think my valley should be an entire lake; but there is no danger of such a catastrophe happening, as my reservoir is filled in a purely artificial manner, and I take care to keep it within bounds. The pipes also down to this lake are contrived so as to regulate the influx of water, therefore there is no fear of a flood. Now you must come and see the theatre.’

‘The theatre! Have you playwrights and actors here?’

‘Our playwrights date from old Hellenic days, and are called Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; the actors are my Greeks. Sometimes Crispin writes us a play bearing on local events, which he satirises after the style of Aristophanic comedy—at least he did so when he lived here, but since his departure we have fallen back on Hellas for our plays.’

‘How often do you give performances?’

‘Only once a year, at the vintage feast. Oh, we follow old customs closely here, and I hope to show you a veritable Dionysiade before you leave us. We have a three days’ festival of simple mirth, without any of the coarse elements which were introduced by the later Hellenes. The first day we have the vintage festival, the second our plays, and on the third there are Olympian games.’

‘With what prizes?’

‘As of yore, the laurel wreath. I am particularly anxious to keep up these games, as it makes my Greeks athletes, and hardens them by muscular exercises, else in this lotos-eating valley they would be apt to become indolent, and then where would Melnos be without brave men to defend her?’

‘You are a perfect Spartan!’

‘I believe in the Spartan training to a great extent,

but I do not think the body should be trained exclusively and the mind neglected ; therefore I have the tragedies performed which were unknown to Sparta. The Spartans were a fine nation of materialists.'

'You are right!' said Maurice earnestly ; 'one should never let the material nature overpower the spiritual.'

'You speak warmly.'

'As I was taught. My mother was a religious woman, and trained me carefully. One cannot rid one's self of youthful teachings ; we may forget them for a time, but they always force themselves before the mind sooner or later.'

'Not always. I also was taught as you, but forty years of solitude—comparative solitude—and pondering have turned me into what I am—an agnostic. So your mother was a good woman ? is she alive ?'

'No ; she died many years ago.'

'And your father ?'

'Is also dead. I am an orphan. No relations in the world—at least, none I care about.'

Justinian gazed at the young man as if he would read his very soul, then, turning away with a half-suppressed sigh, entered the theatre.

It was modelled on that of Athens,—a large semi-

circle hewn out of the volcanic rock, with seats of the red limestone so abundant in Melnos. The stage faced the mountain, and had an altar beautifully sculptured in front of it, and life-size statues of Dionysius and Phœbus on either side.

‘This is our Temple of Thespis,’ said Justinian, as they stood in the centre of the semicircle, which was at a moderate distance from the stage. ‘You see it is not very large, and suitable to the size of the island and the number of population ; so, as the actors can easily be seen, we need neither cothurnus nor mask. Our plays, I am afraid, are not so gigantic as those of ancient Hellas ; but there is one advantage, the face is seen, and the Greeks are wonderfully expressive in revealing their feelings by the countenance.’

‘All Melnos seems to be built of this red stone.’

‘Yes ; I get it from the cliffs of the island. The tint is pleasing, and warms up the landscape. I am sorry we cannot see the ocean from the theatre, as I am very fond of the sea ; but, shut in by this circle of mountains, of course that is impossible. Now we must go and see the silk factory.’

After they had gone through this thoroughly,—for Justinian insisted upon Maurice taking notice of every detail,—the King showed him some hot springs just

outside the village, which bubbled up from the earth, amid rugged blocks of black lava, streaked fantastically with sulphur.

‘These springs are full of medicinal properties, which are useful for the cure of many diseases,’ he said, as they watched the light clouds of steam rising ; ‘but we of Melnos are so healthy, that we rarely use them. Plenty of work, plenty of physical exercise, careful attention to births, and fresh air and water in abundance, keep the whole population in splendid health. It is a case of quality, not quantity.’

‘Have you any poets, painters, sculptors?’

‘Not yet. True, sometimes rude songs are made, and rude pictures painted, but I am afraid centuries of slavery have crushed all the creative power out of the Hellenic race. However, they are free here, and have a city of refuge in this island ; so, in the future, who knows but that Melnos may become a second Attica, and have her Plato, her Sophocles, her Phidias!’

‘It will take years to develop all that genius,’ said Maurice, as they once more began to climb up the staircase.

‘I am afraid so. And I dread who may come after me. I am old, and cannot live long ; so when I die, unless my successor is actuated by the same desire to

found a miniature Attica, as I have been, he may turn this place into a nest of robbers, in which case, I am afraid, King George's Government would interfere, and the aspirations of Melnos to revive Hellenic culture would be at an end.'

'Who is to be your successor?'

'That I do not know. True, I have a daughter, but it needs a man to manage my Greeks. I took Crispin and Andros, in order to train them up as my heirs, but Crispin has become wealthy, and prefers to live in England; while Andros, or, as he now calls himself, Caliphronas, is nothing but a scamp. If he succeeded me, all my work would go for nothing. He would be a tyrant, a robber, a selfish seeker after pleasure, who would destroy the simplicity of Melnos, break all my laws, and transform it into a nest of criminals.'

'Surely you have some clever men among your people?'

'Clever to serve, but bad to rule. None of them have the administrative power required for even so small a community as this. No; to succeed me, I must have an Englishman. We are a dominating race, fit to rule; and a glance round the world will show you our colonising capabilities. By a cool head and a firm hand, I have transformed a barren

island into a centre of prosperity ; and if my successors only follow my policy, in a few hundred years, this little unknown island may become the centre of a great intellectual power. The Athenians, you know, were small in number, yet see the intellectual effect they produced in the world's history. These Greeks of mine are descendants of the ancient Hellenes, and the spark of genius, nearly trampled out by centuries of Turkish misrule, is still within them. Place a plant in the dark, and it grows not ; give it plenty of air and sunlight, and first the green leaves appear, then the bud, lastly the flower. These are my green leaves, which I have placed in the light ; and let them be tended and looked after, who knows but that a glorious flower may be produced.'

'It is a splendid—dream !'

'A dream which may yet turn out truth,' answered Justinian, with energy. 'See how well I have prepared the ground. My people here are physically perfect ; their morality is much above what is to be found in the islands of the *Ægean*. I have taught them to love work, and loathe idleness. The island they dwell in contains all the beauties of nature in a small space. "Infinite riches in a little room," to quote Marlowe. They are starting fairly under my

guidance, and they will develop, as their prototypes of Athens, into a keen, cultured, intellectual race, who may give this modern world as splendid gifts of genius as did their fathers of old. But the plant needs fostering, and I, the gardener, alas! am growing old; so when I die, who will attend to this delicate flower of artificiality? What I want to find is a successor who will do as I have done.'

'That will be difficult.'

'I fear so; unless'—

Here Justinian paused abruptly, and walked rapidly along the mulberry avenue, in which they were now. Maurice waited to hear him speak, but he said nothing until he stood under the graceful Corinthian capitals of the temple pillars, when he suddenly came to a full stop, and looked at Maurice keenly.

'Mr. Roylands, do you know what I think?'

'No, sir.'

'That it would be an excellent thing for you to give up your country-gentleman life in England, and come here.'

'But for what reason?'

'To be my successor.'

Maurice stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment, but in another moment Justinian vanished.



CHAPTER XX.

A DIFFICULT QUESTION.

*If you this question strange decide,
This way, that way, at your pleasure,
It surely cannot be denied,
If you this question strange decide,
That Fate's prerogative's defied,
And thus may grudge your self-won treasure,
If you this question strange decide,
This way, that way, at your pleasure.*



CERTAINLY Maurice felt in a somewhat embarrassing position, on hearing of Justinian's offer to instal him as future King of Melnos, and he hardly knew what decision to make in the matter. At present the affair was so unexpected and bewildering that he hardly grasped the fact of its reality, and remained where he was, leaning against a pillar, wondering if he was asleep or awake. He had come to an unknown island of the Ægean Sea, and therein had beheld a miniature civilisation of a most unique character,

which in itself by its very fancifulness was enough to unsettle his calm reasoning powers, when lo! the man who had created this vision of dead classicism proposed to bestow it on him as a gift. There was something singularly tempting in this offer, especially to a man of Roylands' artistic temperament; for here, in this sea-girt island, he could lead a life of dreamy seclusion, and work at his art amid these rejuvenated Hellenic times, which breathed all the serenity and calm necessary to foster the craving soul of genius. In the riotous modern world of England he had often felt like an alien, and his work, imbued with modernisms, seemed feeble and meretricious after those masterpieces of Greek art which still remain to remind us of the supremacy of Attic sculptors in delineating the human figure. Devoted to his art, had Maurice been asked by some fairy to name his desire, he would certainly have demanded to be placed in kindred circumstances, calm, untroubled, serene, to those masterly Athenian creators who adorned the Parthenon with god-like forms. Lo! without the intervention of an unseen power, his wish had been unexpectedly gratified, yet, now that the boon long dreamed of was gratified, he hesitated as to the advisability of accepting it.

It was difficult for him to make up his mind, from the very contrast of the two existences which lay before him, either of which he could begin from that moment, by a mere acceptance of the one or the other. On the one hand was the turbulent nineteenth century, full of invention, discovery, feverishness, anguish, ambition, like a terrible yet fascinating dream, which involved the straining of every nerve to attain a thankless end; and on the other hand were years of quietness, of dwelling in a modern paradise under a serene sky, with all the incentives to awaken and foster his artistic soul, a reconstruction of that calm Attic existence which seemed so far off and mist-like beyond the stormy waters of mediævalism and modern restlessness. Maurice, always impressionable to his surroundings, felt as did the Ulyssean sailors in the lotos-land, when they were loath to leave the drowsy island for fruitless toilings on the main; he thought this serene existence of Melnos, unvexed by the tumults of nations, was perfect: yet the ambitious spirit of the nineteenth century interest in his being called out to him to come forward and take his place in the fierce fight for fame, for gold, for bread, which vexed the world of to-day. Peace or war—for social

war it was in this modern struggle for existence—he did not know which to choose, and, leaning against that relic of the old classic times, when earth was young, fresh, and joyous, he dreamily pondered over the choice offered to him.

Had Keats, that born Greek, been offered the chance of dwelling in this Hellenic Elysium, how eagerly would he have accepted, and revelled in the serenity of the life, like one of his own young deities, who live so joyously in his delicate verse. Perhaps Heine, longing for the infinite charm of the antique on his mattress-grave in the Rue d'Amsterdam, might have accepted with joy this opportunity to dwell in the placid Greek world he loved so well, and of which he sang so mournfully, so exquisitely. But no!—Heine, bitter, dual soul as he was, had too much of Judæism in his soul to accept gladly a serene existence, unflavoured by that bitter irony, those pen and ink wars, those modern sophistries in which his spirit delighted. Keats—yes! for he was a born Hellene. Heine—no! for the genius of the Jew fought ever with the genius of the Greek to master his soul, and his irony, his orientalism, his Shiraz roses, and blue Ganges, would have rendered him restless even under the changeless blue of the

Attic skies, amid the divine beauty of serene Hellenic art.

Maurice was neither Keats nor Heine, yet partook of the nature of both. He was not a genius, having just escaped the fatal gift of artistic supremacy, still, he had a strong craving for the beautiful, a wish to create, a desire to know ; but in his soul the blind craving of Keats for Beauty and Truth was marred by that fatal scepticism which blighted the genius of Heine. He had the faith of the one, the doubt of the other, and, drawn strongly either way by these opposing forces, paused irresolutely between the two. First he would accept and live the old Hellenic life, then he would refuse, lest such life should lack the sharp, salt flavour of modern existence. An ass between two bundles of hay was Maurice, but, unlike that animal, he knew that each bundle contained what the other lacked, and, greedy of both, doubtful of both, afraid of both, he was quite unable to make up his extremely unstable mind.

A man in such an embarrassing position always makes up his otherwise wavering mind to one thing, and that is, to ask advice, though in nine cases out of ten he never means to take it when given. Maurice was not sure if he would accept advice, yet neverthe-

less went to seek Crispin, in order to lay the matter before him, and ask what he thought was the best course for him to pursue. Crispin was wise, Crispin was friendly, and, moreover, had tried both the ancient and the modern modes of existence, as his youth had been spent in Melnos, his early manhood in civilised Europe ; so surely Crispin, with a knowledge of both sides of the question, was the best to decide for the one or the other.

All the morning Crispin had been hard at work on a formidable-looking epistle to Eunice, in which he told all his perils and adventures, the departure from Southampton, the voyage down the Mediterranean, the wreck of *The Eunice*, and their safe arrival at Melnos. In addition to this narrative, worthy of Marco Polo at his best, he related the comforts in which he and Maurice were now dwelling, in order to set the mind of that gentleman's friends at rest ; but, with considerable craft, the wily poet did not put in any words of loverly affection, as he knew well the Hon. Mrs. Dengelton would read the letter before giving it to her submissive daughter.

In order to circumvent his future mother-in-law, Crispin intended to write a separate letter to Eunice, full of his passion, and then slip it into an epistle by

Maurice, whom he intended to ask to write to the Rector. Mr. Carriston was a friend to the lovers, and would doubtless be able to deliver the letter unseen by the dragon ; thus Mrs. Dengelton would be thwarted should she try and destroy Eunice's affection for the poet by keeping back his letters.

Near Crispin sat Gurt, at the open window, chewing the quid of reflection, and looking excessively dismal, as he found this semi-classical existence somewhat dull, and moreover, true seaman as he was, viewed a prolonged sojourn on land with much disgust. He brightened up, however, when Maurice came in, and twisted his forelock in approved forecastle fashion, with a scrape of his foot.

'Which I ses t' this 'cre gent,' growled Gurt in his raucous voice, "'W'ere is hc?" meanin' you, sir, and Mr. Crispin ses he, "Oh, he's gone down t' valley," so ses I, "He'll see the crew," and ses he, "It's werry likely."

'I'm very sorry, Gurt,' said Maurice in some dismay, 'but the fact is, I've been exploring the village with Justinian, and quite forgot to see after our mariners.'

'I wish you had done so, Maurice,' said Crispin in a vexed tone, looking up from his writing ; 'the poor fellows will think we have forgotten all about them.'

'Oh, we will go down this afternoon,' replied

Maurice hastily. 'I've no doubt they are all right down there. Lots of food and liquor and pretty girls! eh, Gurt?'

Crispin laughed and stroked his chin thoughtfully, while a gleam of humour shone in the solitary eye of the mariner.

'I seed,' said Gurt, addressing no one in particular, 'as tight a little craft as I ever clapped eyes on, gents. Her deck lights raked me fore and aft, they did.'

'Justinian will rake you fore and aft,' observed Crispin dryly, 'especially if you make eyes at his womankind. This is a virtuous island, Gurt.'

'Well, sir, I ain't a-goin' again' it, sir,' growled Gurt reproachfully. 'I care nothin' for the petticoats, I don't. Now if it was Dick, 'now'—here the old sinner cast up his eyes, as if unable to guess at Dick's enormities.

'Oh, that is the smart young boatswain, said Maurice quickly. 'I'm glad he is all right. Why don't you go down and see him, Gurt?'

'Beggin' your pardon, gents both, but I dunno the bearin's of this 'ere island.'

'Go along the mulberry avenue,' said Crispin, 'as Gurt waited for an explanation, 'and when you come to a flight of steps near the tunnel, go down them.

When you're in the village, you'll soon find out your comrades, and tell them Mr. Roylands and myself will come down to see them this afternoon.'

'Right y' are, sir,' answered the seaman, going to the door with another nautical salutation. 'I don't want Dick a-comin' up here to cast anchor aside my little craft.'

'You've begun early, Gurt,' observed Maurice, taking a seat. 'What is the name of your little craft?'

'Zoe, sir; she's maid to Miss Helena.'

'Well, you can go away with a contented heart, Gurt,' said Crispin, laughing. 'Dick won't see her if he comes here in your absence. She's gone up the mountain with her mistress.'

'Right y' are, sir,' said Gurt again, all of him except his head being behind the curtains of the doorway. 'I don't trust Dick. He's a flyaway chap, gents both, and a deal sight too 'handsome for my idea, sirs.'

The head vanished, and Crispin laughed uproariously.

'That mahogany image is jealous, Maurice,' he said, throwing himself back in his chair. 'Behold the power of love! Why, Zoe wouldn't look at him;

and if that good-looking young bo'swain comes on the scene, I'm afraid old Cyclops' chance will be but a poor one.'

'Zoe's gone up the mountain with Helena?'

'Yes; on some flower-gathering expedition. They have been absent some hours, so Caliphronas has gone to look for them.'

'Confound his impudence!'

'Why, you are as jealous of the mistress as Cyclops is of the maid! However, you need not be afraid, for Helena hates our Greek friend, and I shrewdly suspect she has taken an uncommon liking to you.'

'Nonsense!'

'It's a fact, I assure you. Love in her eyes sits playing, so if you love her, and she loves you, no power can cut your love in two.'

'Except Caliphronas.'

'Yes, he is rather in the way; but I've no doubt Justinian will settle him. By the way, where is Justinian?'

'He left me at the steps, after making me a most extraordinary proposal.'

'Indeed! and this proposal?'

'I'll tell you all about it shortly. What are you doing?'

‘Writing to Eunice. This,’ laying his hand on the letter, ‘is a proper epistle, which might be published to all the world, and is prepared especially for the pacification of my dear mother-in-law that is to be. I, however, want you to write to our mutual friend, Mr. Carriston, and enclose a note of mine meant for the eyes of Eunice alone. The Rector is our friend, and will manage to give it to her unknown to Mrs. Dengelton.’

‘Oh, I will write with the greatest of pleasure, and enclose your letter. Besides, I wish to ask the Rector’s advice on a very important matter.’

‘I can guess what that important matter is,’ said Crispin gaily; ‘but why not ask my advice?’

‘I am going to, in a few minutes. By the way, to revert to the letters, how are you going to get them posted?’

‘Oh, Justinian has a felucca laden with currants, silks, and what not, going to Syra to-morrow,—Syra, you know, is the great mercantile station of the Cyclades,—and these letters will be placed in charge of the skipper. From Syra they will easily go to England by the French packet, *via* Marseilles.’

‘Have you any other letters to write—I mean about the shipwreck?’

‘Of course ; I have written to my solicitors, telling them all about the wreck, and instructing them to see the insurance people ; but I suppose nothing can be done till I go back to town myself, and take all the survivors with me. They, I suppose, will have to give all kinds of evidence about the smash-up of *The Eunice* before the insurance money will be paid.’

‘What about Martin’s relations, and the dead sailors?’

‘I am writing about that also. By the way, Maurice, we must get Justinian this afternoon to take his men and go down to the sea-shore to look after the bodies of those poor fellows. It seems horribly heartless of us talking and laughing like we did last night, when so many human beings have lost their lives.’

‘It does rather, Crispin ; but if we had mourned it would not have made much difference. Hang it ! that sounds rather cruel. Crispin, I am afraid a semi-barbaric life is making me heartless.’

The poet said nothing, but, with a sad expression on his face, stared at the table. It did seem heartless for them both to be light-hearted and merry when Martin and the majority of his brave crew

had gone to the bottom ; but there was some excuse, for they themselves had narrowly escaped a similar fate, and that in itself was enough to make them buoyant. After all, the dead are dead, and crying will not bring them back ; but both the Englishmen determined to search for the bodies that very afternoon, and give them Christian burial, which was the only thing they could really do for their lost comrades.

‘What about those sailors?’ asked Maurice, suddenly looking up.

‘Oh, they must remain here until we can find some chance of sending them to Syra. In fact, I’m not sure if I won’t tell my agents to send me out another yacht to replace *The Eunice*, and then they can all ship on board of her.’

‘You extravagant fellow ; another yacht ! Even twelve thousand a year will not stand such reckless use of money.’

‘Oh, I shan’t lose anything,’ replied Crispin cheerfully. ‘I am not too much of a poet to neglect business, and *The Eunice* was heavily insured. When the money is paid by the underwriters, as it must be on my return to England, it will go a long way towards the purchase of another boat.’

‘So much for the buying ; but can you trust your agents to get you a yacht as good as the one you have lost ?’

‘Perhaps not in an ordinary case, but fortunately the twin ship to *The Eunice* is in the market, and resembles her in all respects. That was a few months ago, so if she is still to be had, I will instruct Danton & Slabe to purchase her on my behalf, and send her to the Piræus. Then, when we are tired of Melnos, we can cross over to the mainland, and have a cruise up the Black Sea before returning to England.’

‘That does not sound as if you were anxious to see *Eunice*,’ said Maurice dryly.

‘I shall be very glad to see *Eunice* again,’ answered Crispin, reddening slightly ; ‘but the fact is, I have a small scheme in my head to get *Eunice* and her mother, in company with Mr. Carriston, to come out to Athens in my new yacht.’

‘But with what object ?’

‘Well,’ said Crispin, looking down, ‘the fact is, Maurice, I do not trust your aunt.’

‘As to that, I don’t blame you,’ answered that lady’s affectionate nephew quietly.

‘If she sees a better match for *Eunice* than I am,’

resumed Crispin calmly, 'she will force the poor child into a marriage, and give me the go-by. Mind you, Maurice, I love Eunice dearly, and in my eyes she is nearly perfect, but I cannot conceal from myself that she has a somewhat weak nature, and is dominated by her terrible mother. Once she is my wife, and away from that influence, she will learn to be more self-reliant, and less biassed by other people. Now, I see perfectly well that there is going to be trouble here about Caliphronas.'

'I agree with you there. Caliphronas evidently wants to marry Helena, who does not like him; and, moreover, Justinian refuses to favour the marriage in any marked degree, so Caliphronas is just the kind of sneaking scamp to go over to Alcibiades, and, if possible, make trouble.'

'If that is the case, we are here for some time, and as I see you take the same view of it as I do, you must perceive that it will be a matter of some months. If, then, I am away from England all that time, Mrs. Dengelton will certainly try to persuade Eunice that I shall not come back, and marry her to some one else. However, if I can get Eunice out here, I think I can trump Mrs. Dengelton's best trick. Do you think, if I instruct my agents about the

yacht, and write to Mrs. Dengelton and the Rector, they will come out to Athens?’

‘As to that, I am not sure,’ replied Maurice slowly, ‘but I trust so, with all my heart, as I wish to ask the Rector’s advice.’

‘So you mentioned before, and promised to ask mine. I shall be delighted to give it to you, so tell me what is the matter. Helena?’

‘Partly.’

‘Hum! Caliphronas?’

‘Partly.’

‘Ho, ho! and Justinian?’

‘Yes.’

‘A very pretty trinity,’ said Crispin, lighting a cigarette. ‘Well, what’s to do?’

Maurice tilted his chair back against the wall, and followed Crispin’s example with regard to tobacco, and prepared for a long talk on—to him—a serious subject, viz. the settlement of his future life in one way or the other.

‘First of all,’ said Maurice slowly, ‘I have been all over the village with Justinian, and I cannot tell you how amazed I am. That such a community, that such great works, should owe their origin to one man, is, I think, a miracle. This dream of

Justinian's regarding a new Hellas may or may not come to pass, but he has certainly laid the foundations of a small independent state in a wonderfully judicious manner. What his real name is, I, of course, do not know, but the one he has taken certainly suits him admirably ; he is a Justinian—a born law-giver, and his system meets all the requirements of this simple community. As he says himself, so long as he is at the helm, things will go on all right ; but should he die—which at his age is not unlikely—the success or failure of this infant intellectual state depends on his successor. A wise, clear-headed man would carry out the scheme to a successful issue ; but a hot-tempered, selfish ruler would doom the whole thing to destruction. Justinian told me that he had brought up both you and Caliphronas as his successors ; but as to yourself, you went in search of fame and love in England, and severed yourself entirely from his island community.'

'I did not know Justinian desired me to succeed him,' said Crispin in a tone of wonderment ; 'but even had I known, I hardly think things would have gone differently. I am a poet, not a ruler ; and Napoleons are made of stronger stuff than mere bards

piping their idle song, and letting the world go by. No; Justinian never hinted at such a thing; and I always thought that he favoured Caliphronas as the heir to his island throne.'

'Caliphronas!' echoed Maurice in a tone of deep disdain. 'No; Justinian is too keen a judge of character to mistake our Greek goose for a swan. He told me himself that he does not trust Caliphronas, and more than suspects him of having an understanding with that rascal Alcibiades regarding the capture of Melnos.'

'The deuce!'

'Yes; you may well be astonished; but, from what I have seen of Caliphronas, I believe it is quite likely to happen, the more so as this handsome Greek's vanity will receive a severe blow when he is refused—as he certainly will be—by Helena. Well, you can see that Justinian will not have Caliphronas to succeed him on his island throne, so, you two candidates for the purple being thus disposed of'—

'Yes?' asked Crispin curiously, as Roylands hesitated.

'He wants me to ascend the throne when vacant.'

'You?'

'Myself! Are you not astonished?'

Crispin twirled his cigarette in his fingers, looked thoughtfully at the red tip as if consulting it as an oracle, and then made slow reply.

‘Yes, and no. Justinian evidently sees in you a clear-headed man, who would carry out his scheme if you honourably promised to do so. He is English, you are English, and he trusts none but his own countrymen, so I cannot say that his offer to make you his successor startles me very much.’

‘But, my dear Crispin, granted I have these capabilities you so kindly gift me with, of which I am doubtful, Justinian has only known me two days, and, clever man as he is, he could scarcely come to a conclusion so quickly.’

‘Justinian is a good judge of character, and can tell the nature of a man in five minutes, where you or I would take five years in the search. Besides,’ added the poet, with an imperceptible smile, ‘he may have another and stronger reason.’

‘You mean Helena, I suppose?’

Now Crispin did not mean Helena at all; but as what he did allude to was not his own secret, he let Maurice believe that his supposition regarding Helena was the right one.

‘Well, yes; I suppose Helena is a reason.’

‘Do you think he would let me marry her?’ asked Maurice breathlessly.

‘I am certain he would,’ answered Crispin, looking straight at his companion; ‘quite positive. But you—what about yourself?’

‘I love her dearly.’

‘Two days’ acquaintance—you love her dearly! Is that not rather sharp work?’

‘Two days!’ echoed Maurice contemptuously. ‘I have known her longer than that. I fell in love with her portrait, as you know, and resolved, if she had the qualities I thought she had from her face, I would marry her. From what I have seen of her, I am certain she has those qualities, and would make me a good wife, provided always she consents to marry me. Beautiful, pure, charming, simplicity herself; oh, my friend, she is indeed a prize I may think myself lucky in winning!’

‘When a man is in love,’ said Crispin ‘it is no use reasoning with him; and, as regards Helena, I quite approve of all you say. She will make you an admirable wife; but, think for yourself, how will this uncultured, simple girl look beside the cultured ladies of England?’

‘That is the very point about which I desire to

ask your and the Rector's advice,' said Maurice eagerly. 'Shall I marry Helena, and accept the post of governing this island? or shall I marry Helena, and go back to Roylands?'

'In any case, I see it is "marry Helena,"' rejoined his companion dryly; 'but really I hardly know what to say. Life here is charming and indolent. You like charm and indolence, so why not stay here? On the other hand, you have your ancestral acres, your position in the world, to think of, and if you value these more than a life in this delightful Castle of Indolence—well, go back.'

'I don't know what to do.'

'Well, I have given you my advice, and, as is usual in such cases, you will not take it.'

'It is such a difficult question.'

'Granted! but you'll have to decide one way or the other shortly. One thing is certain, that it would be beneficial to your art.'

'That is true enough.'

'After all,' said Crispin seductively, 'what better life can you desire. A ready-made kingdom, small and compact—a delightful climate—obedient subjects—a lotos-eating existence—and Helena!'

'It is delightful—but duty?'

‘Oh,’ cried Crispin, shrugging his shoulders, ‘of course, if you are going to invoke that bogie, I have nothing further to say. Ask the Rector.’

‘What do you think he will say?’

Crispin burst out laughing, and, sauntering to the window, threw his burnt-out cigarette into the green grass beyond.

‘Did ever any one hear such a man? My dear fellow, I cannot tell you what the Rector will say. He is an ardent Hellenist, with his Aristophanic studies, and may say, “Stay, by all means!” On the other hand, he is an English Church clergyman, with strong opinions as to the absenteeism of landlords, and the duties they owe their tenants, in which case he will certainly make you come back. But in either event you will have your dear Helena.’

‘I’m not so sure of that, Crispin. If I refuse Justinian’s request, he may refuse me Helena.’

‘Certainly ; that is not impossible,’ replied Crispin, returning to his writing. ‘However, I will write to my agents about the yacht, and to Mrs. Dengelton and the Rector about their joining us at Athens. At my invitation the Rector may not come, at yours he will.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you, my dear, simple old Maurice, are the apple of his eye; and if you write him on the question of your staying here, he will certainly hurry out at once, so as to see how matters stand for himself, and advise you for the best.’

‘Will you write as you intend? and I will also send a letter to Carriston.’

‘Don’t forget to enclose mine,’ said Crispin warningly. ‘Remember you are to that extent responsible for my wooing with Eunice. Will you write your letter now?’

A delicious burst of girlish laughter sounded from the court.

‘Helena!’ cried Maurice, rising up so quickly as to upset his chair.

‘Go away! go away!’ said Crispin resignedly; ‘no chance of your writing now with that sound in your ears. But, as the boat does not go till to-morrow, you can have a holiday with Helena this afternoon; therefore, go away.’

‘Caliphronas is with her,’ said Maurice, hesitating.

‘And has been all the morning. Faint heart never won fair lady, so if you don’t oust your rival, I am afraid she will be married by him under your nose.’

‘I’m hanged if she will!’ cried Maurice angrily.

There was a second burst of laughter, upon which Crispin, with raised eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, pointed to the door, and resumed his writing.

Maurice paused irresolutely, looked at the poet, and then darted out of the door like a swallow, to find Helena standing alone in the court, with her arms full of flowers.

‘I have been flower-hunting on the mountains,’ said Helena graciously; ‘and this wild rose is for you.’



CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN ALCIBIADES.

*Sir! there are three degrees of robbery,
With different names, but meanings similar :
For he who does his thievish work himself
Is but a common foot-pad! quite unfit
To mix in gentlemen's society.
A bandit, brigand, robber chief, is he
Who has a dozen men or so to rule,
And steals your daughter, burns your tenement,
Or holds you prisoner till a ransom's paid.
But he who, having armies at command,
Robs brother monarchs of their territories,
Is called a conqueror, because he thieves
Upon a large and comprehensive scale.
Thief, brigand, conqueror! believe me, sir,
The size o' the theft is all the difference ;
For, call them what you please, they're criminals.*



JUSTINIAN, having ascertained all particulars about the wreck of *The Eunice* the previous day, had sent a number of men to look after the bodies of those unfortunates who had been cast up on the beach of Melnos, and now,

in company with the three young men, and the surviving sailors, went to the sea-shore in order to give the corpses decent burial.

Conducted by a body of his Greeks, bearing torches, he went down through the tunnel, and speedily arrived at the outer entrance, from which a sandy beach sloped down to the harbour. Not that it was naturally a harbour, but Justinian had aided Nature to form one, by erecting a breakwater from the end of a jutting promontory, which breakwater, built of huge undressed stones, curved outward into the tideless sea, and thus embraced a calm pool of water, which sufficiently protected ships at anchorage. Beyond, the ocean at times was rough enough, and at stormy seasons dashed its white waves over the rocky mole, but within that charmed circle there was no danger, and the smallest boat was as safe there as it would have been on the serene waters of a mountain lake. This was the work of the English engineer who had planned and carried out the piercing of the tunnel, and Maurice could not withhold his admiration at the perfection of the whole scheme, for without this breakwater it would have been impossible for craft of any size to have cast anchor off the craggy coast of the island.

‘I have two harbours of this kind,’ said Justinian, as they looked at the small boats, feluccas, and caiques which filled the pool; ‘one you see, the other is on the opposite side of the island. As it faces to the west, of course it suffers more from storms than this one, but I built it in order to facilitate escape in time of trouble should the tunnel be taken by assault.’

‘I hardly understand.’

‘There are only two ways of getting into the interior of Melnos. The one is by this tunnel, the other is a pass which cuts through the western side of the mountain where it falls away in a semicircle, as I showed you. Owing to the height of the peaks around, their ruggedness, their being covered all the year round with snow, it is impossible for any outside enemy to climb over them. This tunnel and the western pass are the only modes of ingress and egress, as I have explained. Should this tunnel therefore be forced, and we find ourselves unable to defend the island, all we have to do is to retreat through the pass I told you of, down to the harbour on the other side, where there are plenty of boats ready to take us to a place of safety. Of course I trust in the courage of my Greeks, and the difficulties an enemy would encounter in capturing the tunnel,

so I hardly expect such a contingency as flight by the western pass would occur; still, it is always as well to be prepared for emergencies.'

'You have thought of everything,' said Maurice admiringly.

'Danger sharpens a man's wits,' replied Justinian coolly; 'and when I first came to Melnos, I was surrounded on all sides by rascals of the Alcibiades type.'

'Alcibiades is only a smuggler,' observed Caliphronas, who was listening to this discourse.

'Alcibiades is whatever pays him best,' retorted the King in great ire; 'it is only fear of King George's Government that keeps him from hoisting the black flag, and making these islands of the Ægean a nest of iniquity. I believe you are a filibuster at heart yourself, Andros.'

The Greek laughed consciously, but did not contradict the old man.

'I am like Alcibiades, sir,' he said at length, 'and go in for what pays me best—Mr. Maurice there knows my sentiments regarding life.'

'I do; and very bad sentiments they are!'

'I wonder what you would say to the views of Alcibiades!'

‘He may carry his views more into practice than you do,’ retorted Maurice warmly, ‘but I defy them to be worse.’

Justinian laughed at the blunt way in which Maurice spoke, so Caliphronas, having his own reasons for keeping a fair face to the old man, discreetly held his peace, and they all trudged along the beach, towards the place where the bodies of the ill-fated sailors lay.

The mast of *The Eunice* was still above water, but the yacht herself lay far below the blue sea, where she would probably remain until there was nothing left of her save the engines, which would of course defy time and the ocean, until between them these mighty destroyers rusted them to nothing. From the position in which she lay, and the general calmness of the water, it is probable the yacht could have been set afloat again; but the Greeks of the Cyclades have not sufficient energy for such a task, and the underwriters would no doubt rather pay the insurance money than waste more in an attempt to raise the wreck from the depths below.

Twelve bodies had been thrown up by the sea, but the rest of the crew—with the exception of the ten sailors, including Gurt—were buried deep in the

ocean. Far up in a sheltered nook, under the red cliffs, twelve graves had been dug in the soft sand, and in these were the ill-fated seamen laid. Martin's body was not among them, and it doubtless lay in a sailor's grave nigh the island, encircled by sand, seaweed, and many-coloured shells. The funeral ceremony did not take long, but, as Justinian refused the office, Maurice undertook the task of chaplain, and, with a voice full of emotion, read the beautiful burial service of the Church of England over the remains of the dead sailors, which were then covered up, and roughly-made wooden crosses placed at the head of each humble grave, with the name of each and date of death carved thereon. All those present stood bareheaded during the ceremony, even the Melnosians, who were gentlemen enough not to offend the prejudices of the strangers wrecked on their rugged shores.

Everything having thus been done, in order to show respect to the dead, Justinian and his party returned to the entrance of the tunnel, and Dick, the smart young boatswain before mentioned, attached himself to Maurice, for whom he had a great admiration. Dick had received an education much above that of the average British tar, and Maurice found

him a very companionable fellow, but one who bore a great hatred for Caliphronas, as he seemed to think the lively Greek was the cause of all the misfortunes which had overtaken *The Eunice*.

‘A kind of Jonah, sir!’ said Dick in a whisper, for Caliphronas was walking just ahead of them with Justinian; ‘if we’d a-chucked him overboard, I don’t believe the boat would have gone ashore.’

‘Come, Dick, you cannot say the Count had anything to do with the storm.’

‘Well, I don’t know, sir,’ replied Dick doubtfully, ‘but I don’t believe in him one bit. Why, sir, he cut that rope on purpose!’

‘I know he did!’

‘D—n him!’ muttered the boatswain in a tone of suppressed rage; ‘why don’t you have it out with him, sir?’

‘I can’t very well, Dick. Doubtless he cut that rope, as you say, on purpose; but he was so overcome by terror that he might not have known what he was doing.’

‘He’s a coward, sir—a miserable coward! and he wasn’t overcome so much by terror, as not to save his own life. How long do we stop here, sir?’

‘I can hardly tell you. Mr. Crispin has sent to

England for a new yacht, which will proceed to Athens. I expect we shall be here at least a month.'

'Lord bless you, sir, I don't mind! It's a jolly sort of place, though I can't say I like their sour wine; but the girls are pretty.'

'Dick, Dick, you are too inflammable! Take care you don't get into trouble over these women. Greeks are jealous, you know!'

Dick grinned, as much as to say he considered jealousy of little moment where a pretty woman was concerned, and then asked Maurice a question which made that gentleman laugh heartily.

'You don't happen to know a girl here called Zoe, sir?'

'Oh, Gurt has been speaking about her,' said Roylands with a smile; 'she is Miss Helena's maid, and Gurt has laid his heart at her feet.'

'She won't have anything to say to a battered old hulk like that, sir.'

'Perhaps you think a tight young craft like you would succeed better. Now, Dick, you behave yourself. I've no doubt all the girls in the island are in love with you, so leave Gurt's ewe lamb alone.'

'Oh, I'm not going to poach on Gurt's preserves, sir,' said Dick apologetically; 'but the way he brags

about Zoe is sickening, and I want to have a look at her. She must be the beauty of the island.'

Maurice had his own opinion as to who was the beauty of the island, but, of course, did not impart such information to Dick, who, after respectfully saluting, fell back among his brother sailors, and began to tease the one-eyed Gurt about Zoe, a proceeding which had but little effect on that hardened mariner.

The boat which was going to Syra that day was now lying in the harbour ready to start, and Justinian went on board to give some final orders to her captain, while Crispin also accompanied him, in order to place his bundle of letters in charge of the skipper. He had told Justinian about his proposed purchase of another yacht, a proceeding of which the astute ancient much approved, as, if any of the anticipated troubles came to pass, the yacht would be useful to bring soldiers from Syra to aid him in defending the island.

'Your sailors can stay here until the new boat comes out,' said Justinian thoughtfully; 'for if Caliphronas, as you call him, plays the traitor, we shall require as many men as we can command to defend ourselves.'

‘But Alcibiades has not an army.’

‘Alcibiades knows all the scum of the Levant, and I have no doubt can get a few hundred scamps together. They have no fear of the Government, for if they stormed and took Melnos, after plundering the island they would only have to dissolve again among the population in order to escape. No one could accuse them of their teacup war.’

‘But have we weapons for our men?’ asked Crispin, with considerable trepidation.

Justinian smiled grimly.

‘When we go back to the Acropolis, I will show you my armoury. I have plenty of guns and pistols of the most modern construction, and many of my Greeks are good shots too. Oh, I haven’t neglected the useful for the ornamental, I assure you. What are you looking at?’

‘Alcibiades.’

‘Alcibiades!’ cried Justinian, with a roar like a lion, looking towards the shore, where a number of men were standing, among them a heavy-looking fellow talking eagerly to Caliphronas. ‘So it is. I wonder what brings the rascal here! I must get him away from Melnos at once. Crispin, Roylands, get into the boat—there is no time to lose!’

The active old man rapidly delivered his final orders to Captain Georgios, and then hastily scrambled down to the boat, followed by the two young men. They were speedily pulled ashore, and Justinian, springing on to the rocks, strode up with a frowning face to the group surrounding Alcibiades and Caliphronas, pushing the men on either side with haughty roughness.

‘Now then, Captain Alcibiades, what do you want at Melnos?’

Maurice looked curiously at this celebrated individual, of whom he had heard so much, and beheld a squat, heavily-built man, with fiery eyes, an evil countenance, and a long black beard. He was clad in the usual dress of Greek sailors, consisting of rough blue trousers and jacket, boots of untanned leather, a red shirt, and a tasselled cap of the same colour. To mark his rank, however, he wore a handsome gold-embroidered belt round his waist, in which were placed a rusty-looking knife and a brace of pistols. This, then, was the renowned Captain Kidd of these waters, who, had he lived fifty years earlier, would have been a declared pirate, but who now, owing to the establishment of New Hellas, had to carry on his rascally calling under the pious guise of smuggling

and peaceful trading. With his rough dress, his squat figure, his tangled black beard, he formed a great contrast to the slender form of Caliphronas, with his clean-shaven face and dandy costume of an Albanian Palikar. Yet, in spite of the difference in good looks, the two men had the same cunning expression in their shifty eyes, and there was but little doubt that the rough blackguardism of the one was only refined into the astute scoundrelism of the other.

‘Well, Alcibiades!’ demanded Justinian, imperiously stamping his foot ; ‘what do you want with me?’

‘Kyrion Justinian,’ said the smuggler in a cringing manner, ‘I but landed here to see you and the Kyrion Andros about a cargo of wine I wish to obtain for Crete. I will pay you a good price for it, as the grapes of Melnos are much thought of at Khanea.’

Justinian, on receiving this diplomatic answer, ran his fingers thoughtfully through his silver beard, and pondered as to what answer to give. He was never averse to turning an honest penny by trading, and he knew Alcibiades would pay a good price, as the wine of Melnos was much liked by the Cretans on account of its resinous taste, for the insular Greeks do not as a rule preserve their vintage in this way, which is peculiar to the mainland.

‘How much do you want?’ he said abruptly.

‘Two hundred skins,’ replied Alcibiades glibly. ‘I will give thirty drachms a skin.’

‘Do you think I desire to make you a present of the wine?’ retorted Justinian scornfully. ‘I must have forty drachms a skin.’

‘Kyrio! impossible!’ cried Alcibiades, throwing up his hands with a look of dismay on his crafty-looking face.

‘You won’t get it for less.’

Alcibiades cast a stealthy look at Caliphronas, and considered a few moments.

‘Effendi, I will do it,’ he replied, with the air of one who has made a great sacrifice; ‘but I will be ruined—yes, ruined!’

Justinian nodded curtly, and, turning on his heel, went towards the tunnel, followed by all. Maurice, of course, had not understood a word of the preceding conversation, conducted as it was in Greek; and even Crispin found the speech of Alcibiades a little difficult at times, as that piratical individual was in the habit of mixing up his own tongue with Turkish, French, Italian, and sometimes a scrap of English.

‘Crispin, walk with me—I wish to speak to you,’

said Justinian ; and, the poet having obeyed this command, Maurice was left in the congenial company of Alcibiades and the Count.

Captain Alcibiades kept casting curious glances at Maurice, for Caliphronas had told him about this rich Englishman, and the agreeable old pirate was wondering, in his guileless way, if it would not be possible to kidnap this wealthy foreigner, and hold him in his own little rocky island until such time as his relatives paid a good ransom. Alcibiades was a genuine brigand of the type described by M. About, and, but that he had fallen on evil times of peace and quietness, would doubtless have risen to high rank in his adored profession. With a view to satisfying himself personally as to the wealth of this traveller, Alcibiades, guessing Maurice did not know Greek, spoke to him in French, with which Maurice was sufficiently well acquainted, to enable him to hold an interesting conversation with this accomplished cut-throat.

‘Monsieur is staying here?’ asked Alcibiades, blinking his little eyes.

‘For a time—yes!’

‘Aha! Monsieur is the friend of my dear Andros, so to myself he is also a dear friend. I lay myself at your feet, monsieur.’

‘Very kind of you,’ retorted Maurice, who was not at all pleased by the implied friendship.

‘Monsieur is rich?’

‘What’s that to do with you?’

‘Eh, my faith! do not be angry, monsieur. All Englishmen are rich.’

‘That is a common delusion with you foreigners. All Englishmen are not rich.’

Alcibiades shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in the French fashion.

‘Monsieur is disposed to be witty.’

By this time they had arrived at the entrance to the tunnel, and Justinian who had been in earnest conversation with Crispin, turned round sharply to Alcibiades.

‘You will wait here,’ he said imperiously.

‘Shall not my men come up in order to carry down the wine?’ said Alcibiades, looking as black as thunder at this peremptory order.

‘No. I will send my men down with it, and you can pay the money to Andros here.’

‘But, Effendi’—

‘Enough! I have spoken!’

‘Holy St. Elmo! you will not let me visit your island?’

‘No further than this,’ retorted Justinian significantly. ‘You know the proverb, Captain Alcibiades,—“Ill to him who shows his treasure freely.”’

He turned his back on the baffled cut-throat, and ascended the stairs, followed by his own men, while Alcibiades and his ruffians remained below, evidently mad with anger at having admittance refused them. Rumour said Melnos was full of treasure, and the crafty smuggler wanted to convince himself of the truth of this with his own eyes, so the prohibition against passing the palisade made him very wrathful. The king, however, paid no attention to his black looks, but resumed his journey, with Crispin and Maurice on either side of him. Caliphronas, on the weak pretext of asking Alcibiades some question about the wine, remained behind, a fact which was at once noted by the lynx-eyed Justinian.

‘Traitor!’ he growled in his deep voice, stroking his beard, as was his habit when angered; ‘the fox to the fox. Ah, well I know those two rascals are hatching plots against me.’

‘If you think so, why do you want Caliphronas to go with Alcibiades?’

‘Cannot you see, Crispin? You will never make a diplomatist. I will tell Roylands here, and I am

sure he will discover my reason. Roylands, I am going to deliver this wine to Alcibiades, although I know he does not want it.'

'Why does he buy it then?'

'Because he thought it would be a good pretext to get into Melnos and spy out the weak points of our defence. Oh, I know this is so, else he would not have given me my price so freely. I knew his plan the moment he agreed to give me what I asked, which was a very large price, and one which no honest trader could afford to give. Andros also knows of this scheme. Can you guess how I found that out?'

'Yes; because Alcibiades looked at Caliphronas before agreeing to your price.'

'Exactly!' said Justinian, with great satisfaction. 'Roylands is quicker than you, my dear Crispin. When I refused to sell him the wine unless at my own price, that look to Andros was one of inquiry, and the answer was, "Give him what he asks, or you will not see the interior of Melnos." The rascals! I know their schemes, and will baffle them.'

'Yet, with all this, you propose to send Caliphronas on a little trip with Alcibiades, when they will be able to bring their plot to a head,' said Crispin impatiently.

'Blind, blind, my poet! You forget Andros has

not yet made up his mind with whom to side. If I give him Helena, and make him my successor, he will betray Alcibiades as readily as he would betray me if I refused. Well, the only way to meet treachery is by treachery, so I intend to lead Andros to believe that I will do what he wishes, and will then send him to cruise about with Alcibiades, quite devoted to my interest. Alcibiades, thinking Andros is on his side, will tell him all about his plans, the number of his army, and when he proposes to assault the island, all of which my good Andros will repeat to me. Once I have that information, Andros will find out that I neither trust nor like him, and that he will have neither my child nor my island.'

On hearing this treacherous scheme, Justinian fell in the estimation of Maurice, who, true Englishman as he was, liked everything to be done openly; whereas this Greco-Briton partook more of Ulyssean craft than honest, fair fighting.

'Punic faith,' he said at length, not knowing quite what remark to make.

'Punic faith with Punic neighbours,' retorted Justinian, as they paused at the gate. 'If I don't baffle Andros by turning his own weapons against him, the chances are that he will side with Alcibiades, and one

fine day Melnos will be attacked unawares, and we shall all have our throats cut.'

'Still, your mode of defeating Caliphronas is hardly English.'

'My good sir,' said the old man, with quiet irony, 'Englishmen in their time have had to do just such underhand work. You forget Lord Clive and his false treaty with the Hindoo Omichund, which bound that slippery rascal to the British interest at the time of the battle of Plassy. It promised him everything before the battle, and gave him nothing after it. That is Punic faith, and is necessary in such cases. Straight-forward honesty doesn't pay in these waters.'

'Well, do what you think best, sir,' replied Maurice, who saw Justinian was right. 'It's a case of "When Greek meets Greek," I suppose.'

"Then comes the tug of war," finished Crispin gaily. 'My dear Maurice, you will be happier in the actual battle than in all the statecraft which leads to it.'

'I hope my statecraft will avert the struggle,' said Justinian sombrely; 'but with an enemy like Andros to deal with, I fear for the worst.'

'What are you waiting for here?' asked Maurice, seeing they still lingered at the gate.

'For Andros,' replied Justinian quietly. 'I alone

possess the key, and the gate is never left unlocked. Ah, here is my Carthaginian. Now, you two gentlemen, go on, and leave me to Andros and my Punic faith.'

Maurice and the poet, followed by all the English sailors, entered the gate and resumed their ascent, while the wily Justinian waited with an inscrutable face to entrap the equally wily Caliphronas, who this time, however, had found his master in treachery.

'What do you think of Justinian, Maurice?' asked Crispin, when they were once more in the open air, standing at the head of the staircase, and watching the sailors descending to the village below.

'To speak frankly, I like Justinian.'

'In spite of his Punic faith?'

'As for that,' replied Maurice, colouring a little, 'necessity knows no law; and Caliphronas is such a consummate scoundrel, that I can hardly blame Justinian for trying to beat him with his own weapons.'

'Justinian is a serpent of wisdom,' said the poet reflectively, taking off his sombrero. 'You can have no idea how dexterously he manages these slippery Greeks. They have a wholesome respect for him, as they well may have, seeing that not one of them has ever yet got the better of the King of Melnos.'

‘You used to speak bitterly of Justinian yourself, Crispin. Are your opinions changed?’

‘Yes; I must admit they have changed, and for the better. What you told me the other day about Justinian desiring me for his successor has opened my eyes. It was a fear of losing me that made him refuse to tell me my real name, for he thought I would forsake him and go back to my kinsfolk.’

‘Well, you have certainly forsaken him.’

‘Yes; but I don’t think he regrets it, as he sees I am not made of the stuff necessary to rule this colony of serpents; so now he has no further reason to keep me in the dark, and will, I feel sure, tell me what I wish to know before we leave Melnos.’

‘But you said Justinian thought you were not brave enough.’

‘So he did! so he does! But I fancy I am indebted to my dear friend the Count for that. In all our expeditions with Alcibiades, Justinian was absent, so he could not have personally seen me fighting, and I can only think that Caliphronas, to oust me out of the possible throne, told this about me.’

‘I am sure you are not a coward,’ said Maurice warmly.

‘No, I don’t think I am,’ replied Crispin equably.

‘I fancy if Justinian had seen the storm he would have changed his opinion about Caliphronas ; but, as to myself, I hope yet to right myself in the eyes of the old man. I am glad you have such a good opinion of me, Maurice.’

‘My dear fellow,’ cried Roylands, grasping him by the hand, ‘I have the best possible opinion of you in every way, and always had!’

‘Even when I was a mystery?’

‘Yes ; though I own you were puzzling at times. But you are a coward in one way, Crispin.’

The poet flushed redly, and Maurice hastened to finish his sentence.

‘In the presence of Mrs. Dengelton.’

‘He would be a bold man who felt no fear in the presence of that lady,’ answered Crispin, his face clearing again. ‘But here comes Caliphronas with a smiling face.’

‘A sign that Justinian has succeeded.’

The Greek advanced towards them with a merry laugh, and looked triumphantly at Maurice, who bore his insolent self-complacency with wonderful composure.

‘I shall not see you two gentlemen for a few days,’ he said gaily. ‘I am going on a cruise with Alcibiades.’

‘More piracy?’

‘Perhaps,’ answered Caliphronas mysteriously. ‘Good-bye for the present. I must go down to look after the wine, and if you go back to the Acropolis, tell Helena I will see her before I go.’

With a jeering look at Maurice, the duped scoundrel sprang down the steps, his snowy fustanella fluttering in the breeze, and he glittered down the descent like a brilliant falling star.

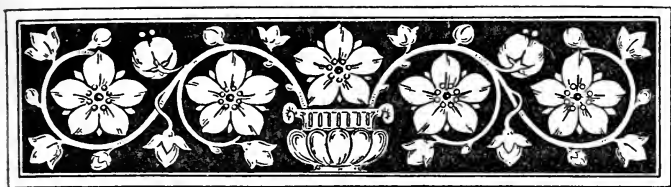
‘You fool!’ said a voice behind them, and they turned to behold Justinian with a complacent smile on his face.

‘Well, you have succeeded, sir,’ observed Maurice doubtfully.

‘I have. Caliphronas thinks he has it all his own way. I see you don’t yet like my tactics.’

‘Well, sir’—

‘Tush!’ replied Justinian coolly. ‘Punic foes—Punic faith!’



CHAPTER XXII.

THE APPLE OF DISCORD.

*A woman caused the fall of man,
A woman caused the fall of Troy;
An apple both these woes began,
Which brought beneath pale Sorrow's ban
All earthly joy.*

*For Eve was fair, and Helen fair,
Each wrought destruction by her face;
They captured hearts in beauty's snare,
And made mankind the burden bear
Of their disgrace.*

*To-day the story we repeat:
A woman wins, or loses all;
She plucks the fruit for us to eat,
We taste and find the apples sweet,
And then we fall.*



HE ill-fated *Eunice* had been wrecked about the middle of August, and it was now nearly the end of September, close on the celebration of the vintage feast, which Justinian determined to observe with great splendour, so as to

gratify Maurice with an accurate representation of the ancient Dionysia of Athens.

Crispin for the moment had resumed his old occupation of playwright, and had furbished up one of his old dramas, not having the time to write an absolutely new one. In this play both Caliphronas and Helena were to take part, and the author himself, like a modern *Æschylus*, acted as stage manager, drilling the chorus, arranging the scenery, attending to the music, and coaching the principal actors in their parts. The people of Melnos were also busily preparing for the vintage feast of the first day, and for the Olympian games of the third ; but amid all these peaceful occupations Justinian kept a watchful eye on Caliphronas, and neglected nothing that might guard the island against a sudden assault by Captain Alcibiades and his gang.

Completely deceived by the behaviour of the Demarch, Caliphronas, now assured both of Helena and Melnos, eagerly entered into the plans of the cunning old man, and, on returning from a week's cruise with Alcibiades, revealed a wide-stretching conspiracy among the Levantine Greeks for the capture of Melnos. Far and wide Alcibiades with great art had instilled a belief into the minds of

all the idlers, vagabonds, and scamps of the *Ægean*, that Melnos contained immense treasure, and weekly, leaders of bands of men repaired to Alcibiades' rocky little island to receive instructions as to how their plans were to be carried out. Of course, the wily old pirate was the leader, and arranged all his schemes in the most dexterous manner, for he gave his commands to those chief men who came to see him, and they, returning to their own islands, communicated such orders to their own followers. By this means Alcibiades had collected quite an army, all eager for plunder, and they had arranged among themselves to attack Melnos, either by the tunnel or the western pass, at the first convenient opportunity.

It may seem strange in the eyes of civilised people that such a conspiracy should be planned and carried out under the very nose of the Greek Government, but all the operations were conducted with great caution; the different portions of the proposed army were scattered piecemeal over the islands of the *Ægean*, so there was really nothing to arouse the suspicion of the authorities that any revolutionary movement was in course of formation. Besides, Melnos being in the extreme south of the Archipelago

and close to Crete, that home of Turkish misrule, any local disturbance would be taken comparatively little notice of, as such disturbances were quite common ; so it seemed as though Alcibiades and his brother scamps were going to have things all their own way. Once they captured and plundered Melnos, they had no fear of the future, as, once they dissolved into small companies and returned to their own islands, it would be quite impossible for the Greek Government, even if they did interfere, to punish a body of men which to all appearances had no existence.

The plans of Alcibiades were very simple, for, having arranged with the leaders of the several bodies of men that they would join in his schemes, he commanded that they should all meet on his own island on a certain day,—as yet unfixed,—when in the aggregate they would number quite three hundred men, and could thus storm Melnos, which could only be defended, as they knew, by two hundred, inclusive of women. In fact, the population of Justinian's island capable of bearing arms, even including the English sailors and his guests, scarcely numbered more than one hundred and twenty men ; so when the fiery old Englishman heard from Caliphronas of the

strength of the enemy, he saw that the danger was indeed serious.

Melnos, however, was strongly fortified against the inroads of these ill-armed pirates, for the tunnel, defended by its palisade, could hardly be forced if held by a small body of resolute men, and the western pass was commanded by two pieces of ordnance, one on either side, which would sweep down the stormers by the score should they attempt to carry this natural entrance by assault. As to the rest of the island, it was quite impossible for the marauders to climb over the rugged, snow-clad peaks ; so what with his cannon, defences, arms of the most modern construction, and his resolute men, Justinian felt that he could defy Captain Alcibiades and his ill-armed crew.

The old Demarch still permitted Caliphronas to remain in his fool's paradise, as matters were in a delicate position, and he resolved to wait until after the three days' festival before coming to a perfect understanding with the treacherous Greek. Caliphronas, therefore, regarding himself as entirely favoured by fortune, became almost unbearable in his insolence, and had not Maurice known the real facts of the case, a serious quarrel would certainly have taken place between them. As it was, however,

the young Englishman saw that the Greek was completely duped by his false prosperity, and would almost have pitied his blind confidence in his good fortunes, had not the arrogance, insolence, and spite of the Count inspired him with the utmost contempt.

Caliphronas, indeed, was hated by every one in the island : by the common people, owing to the haughtiness and scorn he invariably displayed towards them ; by the English sailors, who thought him a coward, and had never forgiven his treachery on the night of the wreck, which had cost their captain his life ; and by all the inmates of the Acropolis, who despised this brilliant butterfly heartily. Quite unaware of the delicate ground on which he was treading, Caliphronas, in his gorgeous Albanian costume, swaggered about the place in a most offensive manner, and quite assumed the demeanour of a despot, much to the amusement of Justinian, who chuckled grimly as he saw the blind confidence of the Greek. However, it was the calm before the storm, and everything went along smoothly enough, save for an occasional outbreak between Maurice and the Count about Helena, who was a veritable apple of discord between these fiery young men.

Helena herself disliked Caliphronas intensely, as

she was only too well aware of the mean, petty soul contained in that splendid body, and his outward beauty had no effect upon her, knowing as she did what a truly despicable wretch the man was. His admiration for her was purely a sensual one, for he knew nothing about true, pure love, and all he wanted was to have this lovely woman to himself, to be his mistress and slave. Doubtless this was the same animal passion as was cherished by Paris, son of Priam, for that other Helen, whose beauty could scarcely have been greater than that of her namesake of Melnos; and Caliphronas, like his Trojan prototype, was inspired by no purer deity than Venus Pandemos. When the Count paid her compliments, Helena shuddered, so instinctively did her virgin soul feel the impurity of this persistent suitor, and treated him with marked coldness, much to the anger of Caliphronas, who complained bitterly to Justinian of the scorn with which his advances were met.

‘My good Andros,’ said Justinian one day, when he had been inveighing against the caprices of women, ‘why do you come to me for assistance? If that handsome face, that fine figure, that smooth tongue, cannot win the affections of a woman, nothing else will.’

‘I believe she likes that Englishman,’ muttered the

Greek, in no wise pleased at the ironical tone of the Demarch.

‘I am not responsible for her likes and dislikes,’ retorted Justinian coldly, although he heard this remark with much inward satisfaction. ‘However, you have my promise.’

‘And you will keep it?’

‘Only on condition that you keep me informed of the schemes of Alcibiades.’

‘Oh, I will do that. I will do anything to win Helena; but if you deceive me, it will be the worst day’s work you ever did.’

‘There is no necessity to threaten without cause,’ replied Justinian, bridling his anger at the insolence of the Count; ‘you will have both Helena and Melnos, but before announcing this publicly, I wish to wait until after the Dionysia.’

‘Very well,’ answered Caliphronas, turning on his heel; ‘a week or so will make no difference to me. But when I am publicly acknowledged as your son-in-law and successor, the first thing I will do will be to turn Crispin and this insolent Englishman out of the island.’

‘Well, well, we’ll see about that,’ said Justinian, with great indifference; ‘wait till after the Dionysia.’

After this conversation, Caliphronas went away perfectly satisfied that everything was going in his favour, which was extremely foolish, as he might have guessed something was wrong from the unnatural calmness of Justinian. Formerly the old Demarch had been given to outbursts of fiery wrath when his will was crossed, however slightly; but now he bore the insolence of the Greek so quietly, that a less astute man than Caliphronas would have been placed on his guard by this unusual suavity. The Count, however, blinded by his good fortune, rushed madly forward, heedless of the abyss yawning before him, and deemed that the self-restraint of his proposed father-in-law arose from the feebleness of age. If he could have seen the passion of Justinian when he was once more alone, he would have changed his mind; but this he was unaware of, and his self-conceit and egotistical blindness kept him in perfect ignorance of the approaching storm.

It was with great satisfaction that Justinian saw the great admiration Maurice Roylands had for Helena, the more so when he noticed that his daughter was disposed to look favourably on the suit of the handsome young Englishman. Helena, indeed, in spite of her real simplicity, was a born

reader of character, which happy trait she inherited from her father, just as she inherited the fair beauty of her Greek mother ; and the more she saw of Maurice, the more she loved him for his kindly heart, his honourable nature, and the delicacy with which he treated her. Caliphronas, confident in his manly beauty, paid his addresses with the air of a conqueror,—a mode of wooing which few women like, and Helena least of all, as it fired her proud soul with indignation ; and when she saw how deferential was Maurice in his courting, she naturally enough preferred the diffident Englishman to the over-confident Greek. But true daughter of Eve as she was, in spite of her dislike to Caliphronas, she could not resist at times the temptation of speaking kindly to him, in order to arouse the jealousy of Maurice. In this she was quite successful ; and though Roylands could not but deem her wise to lull Caliphronas into a false security at the present crisis, still he was madly jealous of every look she bestowed on the Greek, and the two suitors were always on terms of ill-concealed enmity with one another.

Of course Helena was quite ignorant of all her father's plans, and merely treated Caliphronas with unexpected kindness out of pure coquetry, being

quite delighted when she saw how such caprice annoyed the man she truly loved. A woman may worship a man, and look upon him as the sole object of her adoration, yet even the wisest, the purest, the kindest woman cannot help teasing her god a little, out of sheer capriciousness. It is playing with fire, certainly, and many women burn their fingers at this perilous game of 'I-love-you-to-day-and-you-to-morrow,' yet they will indulge in such coquettish triflings, either to make the man they love value them the more, or out of purely feminine desire to see his anger. Women instinctively know that what is won with difficulty is more valued than that which is gained with ease; and besides, it flatters a man into thinking he is superior to his fellow-creatures in fascination, when he secures an affection which has fluttered doubtfully here and there before centring finally in his precious self. Think you Cleopatra would have kept Antony so long her slave, had she not stimulated his love occasionally by giving him cause for jealousy? By no means. Octavia was humble, faithful, true, and loving, so Marcus Antonius grew weary of such domestic virtues, and turned to Cleopatra, who kept him in a constant state of alarm lest her fickle nature should choose another lover.

Helena knew nothing of Cleopatra's wiles, but she instinctively knew that the way to win a man is to place a prize almost, but not quite within his reach ; so she flirted with Caliphronas, and would have flirted with Crispin, had he given her a chance, yet cared more for Maurice, whom she thus tortured, than for all the rest put together.

To-day she was on her best behaviour, however, and was seated with Maurice in the court, weaving a coronal of flowers for her adornment at dinner. Helena was fond of wreaths, and rarely made her appearance at any meal without a chaplet of roses, or ivy and violets, or delicate white lilies adorning her golden tresses. Crispin was in his room, engaged in writing his drama. Caliphronas was holding the above-mentioned conversation with Justinian ; and the two young people sat lazily in the sunshine, Maurice smoking cigarettes, and Helena weaving her wreath with myrtle and roses and sweet-smelling violets.

The sun shone brightly on the white marble court, with its treasures of many-coloured blossoms, the fountain flashed like fire in the lustrous light, and the white pigeons, whirling aloft in the cloudless brilliance of the sky, at times settled down on the

roof in milky lines with gentle cooings. Helena, with her hands buried in flowers and many-coloured ribbons, was humming a quaint little song of the madrigal type, set to a simple, sweet melody, which rendered it very charming.

*'Chloe, take you rose and myrtle,
Weave them in a dainty fashion,
Deck with such your rustic kirtle,
They are type of Colin's passion.
For with roses do I woo thee,
Sue thee! woo thee! woo thee! sue thee!
Hey, pretty maiden, I come a-courting,
Join me, I pray, in such merry, merry sporting,
With a fa-la-la-la, pretty maiden.*

*Colin, take you pansies only,
From your dream of love awaken,
Deck with such your cottage lonely,
They are type of love forsaken.
For with pansies do I flout thee,
Doubt thee! flout thee! flout thee! doubt thee!
Hey, jolly shepherd, come not a-courting,
Join will I not in such silly, silly sporting,
With a fa-la-la-la, jolly shepherd.'*

'Where did you learn that pretty song?' asked Maurice, whom the air struck as familiar.

'My father taught it to me,' replied Helena, putting her head on one side to observe the effect of a newly added rose. 'Is it not dainty? Ribbons, and silks, and flowers, and pipings; quite unlike the real

shepherds and shepherdesses of Melnos, but deliciously delicate for all that.'

'I wonder where your father picked it up?'

'Oh, father knows plenty of old tunes, and I am so fond of them. Why do you ask?'

'Because, curiously enough, that song was written by a Carolean ancestor of mine, and I cannot think how Justinian came to know it.'

'It is strange, certainly,' said Helena thoughtfully.

'Helena, who is your father?' asked Maurice impulsively.

'Demarch of Melnos.'

'Yes, I know that ; but what is his English name?'

'That I cannot tell you,' replied Helena, shaking her pretty head. 'I know nothing beyond that he is Justinian, that I am his daughter, and that this is our island.'

'It's like "The Tempest," is it not? You are Miranda, Justinian Prospero, and I'—

'And you?' queried Helena, with a slight blush.

'Cannot you guess?' asked Maurice significantly.

The girl laughed, and looked down at her flowers.

'I suppose Ferdinand?'

'Oh, you know "The Tempest"!' said the young man, with some surprise.

‘I know all Shakespeare’s plays. Do you think I am so very ignorant?’

‘I think you are very delightful.’

‘Maurice! I thought English gentlemen did not pay compliments.’

‘I am the exception that proves the rule,’ he replied audaciously. ‘However, I might have guessed Justinian would have an odd volume of Shakespeare about with him. The Englishman believes in the Bible and Shakespeare, the Englishwoman in the Bible and Burke.’

‘Who is Burke?’

‘The man that wrote the English Peerage.’

‘What is a peerage?’

‘You have read Shakespeare, and do not know what a peerage is! Helena, I’m ashamed of you!’

‘If you talk like that, Maurice, I shall certainly not give you this rose.’

‘Then I won’t talk like that; so give me the rose.’

‘Not yet; you must win it first.’

‘Helena! you are as hard-hearted as the Chloe of your song.’

‘Am I? but if I don’t give pansies’—

‘Helena!’

He made a sudden movement towards her of ill-suppressed eagerness, whereupon she, having betrayed herself more than she wished to have done, feigned anger to escape from the declaration which she saw was trembling on his lips. Why she did this, it was hard to say, as she loved Maurice very much, and longed to hear him tell of his passion, yet she nipped his declaration in the bud. Why? Ask a woman to solve the mystery, for it is beyond the power of any man to unravel.

‘See!’ she said playfully; ‘you have upset all my flowers. Pick them up at once.’

The obedient Maurice went down on his knees before this pretty tyrant and began to collect the flowers. The position was worse than the words, so Helena, seeing the danger, hastily began to talk of the first thing that came into her head.

‘Talking about “The Tempest”—who is Andros?’

‘Ariel for looks, Caliban for wickedness.’

‘And Crispin?’

‘Crispin is Gonzalo, the honest old counsellor.’

Helena made a pretty grimace, and ordered Maurice back to his chair, which was at a safe distance, and did not admit of any embarrassing endearments.

‘Miranda was very fond of Ariel, wasn’t she?’

‘Yes, I suppose so, but she hated Caliban. Do you like Caliban?’

‘Well, I like Ariel.’

‘Then what about Ariel-Caliban — Caliphronas?’ asked Maurice, vexed at her fencing.

‘I can’t bear him — and yet,’ continued Helena reflectively, with a certain spice of malice, ‘there is something nice about him.’

‘You can’t bear him, and yet there is something nice about him!’ echoed Maurice bitterly. ‘I don’t understand you.’

‘I don’t understand myself.’

‘Can I explain you?’ asked Roylands eagerly, drawing his chair a little nearer.

Helena hesitated, blushed, then made a very irrelevant remark.

‘Tell me about Roylands.’

Maurice very nearly uttered a bad word, he was so angered at her coquetry, but, thinking the best way to pique her was to meet her with the same weapons as she used, at once acceded to her request, much to her secret dismay.

‘Stupid!’ thought the lady.

‘Flirt!’ thought the gentleman.

Decidedly these two young people were at cross-purposes.

‘Roylands,’ said Maurice, pushing back his chair into its former place, ‘is a large park formerly owned by one of the Plantagenet kings.’

‘What is a Plantagenet king?’

‘I shall have to give you a book of Mangnall’s Questions to learn,’ said Roylands in despair. ‘*Planta genista* is the Latin name for broom. Do you know what broom is?’

‘Yes; the mountains are sometimes quite yellow with it. Father told me it was called broom.’

‘Well, some of the English kings used to wear it in their helmets as a badge, so that is how they got the name of Plantagenet.’

‘You are quite a dictionary.’

‘I am glad to be so when my pages are turned by so fair a hand.’

This answer nonplussed Helena, and for once she was fain to hold her peace.

‘The park,’ resumed Maurice, observing this with inward satisfaction, ‘was given to one of my ancestors by his sovereign, and has been in our family ever since.’

‘Is it a pretty place?’

‘Well, it has not the exquisite beauty of Melnos, but it is very lovely in my eyes.’

‘Is the house like this?’

‘No ; quite different. Such magnificence would not do for a poor country gentleman like myself. It is an old Tudor house, built in the reign of Henry VIII.’

‘I know Henry VIII.,’ said Helena vivaciously.

‘Shakespeare, I suppose? What a charming way of learning history! Yes, Roylands Grange is a Henry VIII. house of red brick, and is covered with ivy. Green lawns with flower-beds are before the terrace, and the whole is encircled by the park.’

‘How lovely it must be, Maurice! And is it all your own?’

‘Yes ; at least, it is, unless my Uncle Rudolph turns up.’

‘Your Uncle Rudolph!’

‘Oh, that is our one family romance. Rudolph Roylands was my father’s elder brother, and they were both in love with my mother. She favoured my father, Austin, and the brothers had a quarrel which ended in blows. Austin got the worst of it, and Rudolph, thinking he had killed him, fled. Since then, nothing has been heard of him, and that is quite forty years ago.’

‘But how does this affect your owning the Grange?’

‘Because I am only the second branch. Uncle Rudolph was the heir to the Grange, not my father; so if he turns up alive, or if he has left heirs, I shall have to give up all my property to them.’

‘Would you mind very much?’ asked Helena in a pitying manner.

‘Not at all. I would have once; but now I have a chance of staying in this delightful island, I don’t think it would be such a great loss after all.’

Maurice had hardly said these words when he heard a grunt of satisfaction behind him, and on turning his head saw Justinian standing beside him, in company with Caliphronas.

‘So you don’t mind if you lose your English property,’ said the Demarch in a peculiar tone.

‘No; not when I can stay here. Did you hear the story I was telling to Helena?’

‘Some of it. Do you think your Uncle Rudolph is alive?’

‘Hardly, after forty years.’

‘What is forty years to a long-living race like the Roylands?’

‘How do you know we are long living?’

‘Why, you told me so yourself,’ said Justinian

hastily ; 'but, after all, your uncle may be alive, and claim the property, in which case you will be penniless.'

'Oh, then, I shall stay here as sculptor to your public works.'

The old man laughed approvingly, and nodded his head.

'I shall be glad of that. None of my Greeks can sculpture. It is a lost art with the Hellenes since the days of Praxiteles.'

'I will make a statue of Helena here as Venus Urania.'

'Better as Chloris,' remarked Caliphronas, with a forced smile, coming forward ; 'Chloris, the goddess of flowers.'

'For that charming suggestion,' cried Helena, rising to her feet, 'I will give you a rose, Andros !'

'I will treasure it as my life,' he replied in a low, passionate voice, as she fastened the flower in his embroidered jacket.

'What about my rose, Helena?' asked Maurice, who viewed this proceeding with silent rage.

'Here is one for you,' answered Helena quickly ; 'both roses are red, so you can't complain I don't treat you fairly.'

‘Perhaps you had better make the roses white, in order to mean silence,’ said Caliphronas, pale with anger as he saw Maurice receive a flower; ‘the red rose means love, you know.’

‘Sisterly love,’ retorted Helena, looking at him with an undeniable frown.

Caliphronas, with a sudden outburst of rage, tore the flower from his breast, flung it on the pavement, and walked out of the court without a word. Helena in astonishment turned to Maurice, only to find that he also had vanished, but, with more self-restraint than the Greek, had taken his rose with him. Only Justinian was left, and he, looking sadly at his daughter, placed his hand reproachfully on her shoulder.

‘My child,’ he said reprovingly, ‘do not make ill blood between these two men by your woman’s wiles. Ate flung the apple of discord on the table of the gods, but it would have done no harm but for woman’s jealousy. Your name is Helena, you are, I doubt not, as fair as she of Troy, so beware lest your beauty be as fatal to Melnos as it was to Ilium.’



CHAPTER XXIII.

BACCHANALIA.

*Clash of cymbals, beat of drum,
O'er the mountain peaks we come,
Far from parchèd Hindostan
To these laughing realms of Pan.
Nymphs and satyrs reel about,
Frenzied in the frenzied rout,
Crowned with ivy, fir, and vine,
Leading on the god of wine.
Far and near, and near and far,
Flock ye to his conquering car ;
Lo ! he comes in merry mood,
O'er the hills and thro' the wood,
While the startled Dryades see
From their trees our revelry ;
As we shout so loud and free,
Io Bacche ! Evohè !*



CELEBRATE the fête of St. Dionysius to-day,' said Justinian, as they stood, in the early morning, on the platform of the Acropolis, awaiting the arrival of the Bacchanalian band from below.

‘St. Dionysius!’ repeated Maurice, with emphasis. ‘I thought the gentleman of that name was an Olympian!’

‘He was,’ interposed Crispin before Justinian could speak; ‘but have you forgotten Heine’s account of how the heathen divinities were transformed into mediæval saints? St. Dionysius is our old friend Bacchus in a new guise; Athena has given place to the Virgin Mary—the Panagia, as they call her in Attica;—Zeus is still the Supreme Being, with awful locks and thunderbolt; while Apollo the Far-Darter masquerades in classical adolescence as St. Sebastian.’

‘And Venus, Mr. Professor?’ asked Helena, with a gay smile.

‘Venus,’ answered Crispin, with a profound bow, ‘still lives in the Ægean Seas as Helena of Melnos.’

‘What a charming compliment!’ cried the girl, who, in her plain white chiton, purple-edged peplum, and silver-banded hair, looked indeed like Aphrodite incarnate. ‘What about Andros here?’

‘Hermes!’

Caliphronas, poising himself lightly on the verge of the staircase, certainly was the herald of Olympus, the divinised athlete; the more so as, instead of his voluminous fustanella, he wore a simple tunic of fine white wool, which displayed his fine figure to the

greatest advantage. His curls, yellow as those of Achilles, a true Achaian colour, were bare, as he never wore a head covering unless forced to do so, and thus, stripped of all artificial aids to beauty, he looked the incarnation of Hellenism, the genius of Greece, ever fair and blooming in eternal adolescence. Even Justinian was struck with the manly grace and perfect vitality of the young man, yet, after an admiring glance at this physical perfection, turned to Maurice, and quoted a line of Homer—

“Faultlessly fair bodies are not always the temples of a god-like soul.”

‘It is curious you should say that, sir,’ observed Maurice; ‘for my old tutor, Mr. Carriston, said the same thing about the same man.’

‘Carriston!’ echoed Justinian hoarsely.

‘The Rev. Stephen Carriston, Rector of Roylands,’ replied Maurice, amazed at this emotion; ‘did you know him?’

‘Know him?’ said the Demarch, with a forced smile; ‘no. I have been absent from England these many years. Rector of Roylands!’ he muttered in an undertone; ‘strange, strange!’

‘What is strange?’ asked Roylands curiously.

‘Nothing, nothing!’ answered Justinian, turning

away with a frown. 'I was thinking of something which you would not understand. But here come our Bacchanalians, Maurice. Now, you will see a glimpse of ancient Hellas.'

Maurice pondered over the strange emotion of Justinian, which he found himself quite unable to explain, and, coming to the conclusion that the Demarch must have met some one of the same name under unpleasant circumstances, he dismissed the subject from his mind as trivial, and concentrated his attention on the rapidly approaching procession.

Justinian had closely followed the old lines of the Dionysian ceremonies, saving that he expurgated all the coarser elements of drinking and debauchery, and during the whole three days' festival, modelled on the ancient feasts of Hellas, Maurice did not espy one offensive thing, which could bring a blush to the cheek of modesty. Indeed, Helena and all the women of the island were present, so their mingling in the ceremonies would alone have prevented any coarseness, even without the stern interdiction of the Demarch; for the Greeks have a great sense of delicacy, being especially careful not to offend the delicacy of women in any way whatsoever. This modern Bacchanalia, then, represented the antique

solemnity, as it was in the earlier Attic days, before later worshippers defiled the rites of the god with their vile orgies.

It was a perfect day, but, as there had been a slight rainfall in the morning, in the east loomed a sombre cloud, which, however, foreboded nothing, as across its darkness, like a many-hued scarf, was flung a splendid rainbow. Helena caught sight of this first, and clapped her hands merrily.

‘Oh, father, see how red is the rainbow!—that is a good sign for the vintage.’

‘How so?’ asked Roylands, somewhat puzzled at this Iris prophecy.

‘It is an old Greek superstition,’ answered Justinian, smiling at his daughter’s glee: ‘if red prevails in the rainbow, there will be plenty of grapes; if yellow, a fine harvest; and when green, it will be a year for olives. This one is reddish, as you see, so our Bacchanalia will turn out successfully.’

In front of the procession marched the musicians, men playing on pipes, flutes, drums, and goat-skin sabounas, a kind of bagpipe, while beside them danced young ivy-crowned girls, clashing cymbals together. All the men were dressed in their dancing costumes, similar to that of Caliphronas, save that all

the colours of the rainbow were represented, though the women, still in their loose white chitons, neutralised to some extent the vivid tints of the male dresses. Behind the musicians came lads garlanded with wreaths of intermingled violets and ivy, bearing thyrsi. Afterwards a number of maidens, with vineleaf-decorated amphoras of wine, baskets of figs, and bunches of grapes. A goat, with a child on its back, was led by two elderly women waving pine branches. Then came the elders of the village, in white robes, with tall linen mitres, followed by a joyous band of young men, profusely bedecked with flowers, who capered round a sedate ass, on which rode the wit of the village, representing Silenus. An empty chariot, drawn by goats as a substitute for panthers, then appeared, and in this was to be installed the Count, who undertook the rôle of Bacchus. The procession finally closed with the ten sailors walking two abreast, their stiff march contrasting strangely with the acrobatic dancing and careless grace of their fellow-revellers.

Arriving at the foot of the steps, the chief elder made a speech in sonorous Greek, in which he invited Justinian and his friends to come down to the village festival, and bring good fortune to the vintage. Justinian graciously accepted the invitation, and, in

company with his guests, placed himself in the rear of the procession; while Caliphronas, who had been crowned with vineleaves, arrayed in a leopard skin, and bore a pine cone-tipped sceptre, sprang into his chariot with a laughing glance, as the revellers saluted him—‘*Evoë Bacche!*’

Back to the head of the grand staircase returned the procession, with its wild music and merry dancers, while the god, lightly brandishing his sceptre, looked benignly on his motley crew. Some had fawn skins, all were crowned, and before the procession ran children strewing the road with flowers, while the company sang songs in praise of St. Dionysius, whom Caliphronas was supposed to represent, rather than the genuine son of Semele. Silenus, by his drunken gestures, and difficulty in keeping his seat, evoked roars of laughter, and was quite the hero of the hour.

‘I never did see sich tomfoolery,’ growled Gurt, who was enjoying himself hugely; ‘this Baccus is all tommy rot. Like a Lor’ Mayor’s show it is.’

‘Oh, it’s a great spree,’ said Dick cheerfully, who was Gurt’s companion in the march. ‘Ain’t these girls like the ballet at the Alhambra?’

‘Never was there,’ growled Gurt, who, when not absent from England, generally remained in the

neighbourhood of the docks; 'but I'm blessed if I ever did hear sich music, with their Hi ho Baccus! Who's Baccus?'

'The god of wine.'

'I wish he was the god of rum,' said the old toper; 'for this 'ere sour stuff as th' give us is 'nough to give us all cold in our insides. Lor', wot music! Let's give 'em a shanty.'

'The skippers might not like it,' objected Dick anxiously.

'Oh, they don't mind. I ain't going to let these coves have it all their own way.' Whereupon Gurt, in a raucous voice, struck up 'Rule, Britannia,' much to the amusement of Justinian. His messmates joined in the chorus, and though the wild orgiastic music still continued, it was almost drowned in the lusty chorus of 'Britons never shall be slaves,' roared out by ten pairs of lusty lungs.

The chariot of the god had perforce to be left at the head of the staircase, and Caliphronas, descending, led the way down to the valley, followed by all his barbaric crew. Shrill sounded the pipes, loud clashed the cymbals, and the bright sunshine shone on as merry a company of wine-worshippers as ever it did in the Athens of Æschylus.

The vineyards of Melnos were planted on the sides of the mountain, where they rose terrace by terrace nearly up to the dark pine woods, which divided the vegetation from the snow with a broad green band. A wine-press was placed in nearly every one of these vineyards, but the place where the ceremonies were to take place lay near to the theatre, and was a particularly large enclosure, filled with long straggling vines, in the centre of which a huge whitewashed tank, piled with purple grapes, stood ready to be tramped out to the lower tank into which the juice flowed.

Justinian and his guests were conducted to a kind of raised dais, on which were placed seats tastefully wreathed with flowers, the most elaborate of all being reserved for Caliphronas, who, as the presiding deity of the feast, ranked for the day higher than the lord of the island. The scene was singularly picturesque : far above, piercing the blue sky, arose the snowy peaks, lower down the pine forests, then fields of yellow corn, divided by belts of grey olive trees and grape-laden vineyards, while the slopes near the scene of the festival were covered with red-berried mastic bushes, delicate white cyclamens, rose-blossomed oleanders, pomegranate trees, and beds of strongly-scented thyme, filling the still warm air with

aromatic odours. Amid all this beauty were the Bacchanalians with their many-coloured garbs, the whiteness of the women's dresses predominating, and the whole laughing throng swaying, leaping, whirling, bounding, gyrating to the wild music, shrill and plaintive as the wind, of their rude instruments. In such a vineyard might Dionysius appear to some modern Æschylus, and command him to kindle anew, with the breath of genius, the fire of the ancient goat-song, with its solemn splendours, gigantic scenes, and majestic figures of god, goddess, and hero.

As a rule, the vintage of the insular Greeks begins early in August, but this year, for some unexplained reason, the grapes had ripened slowly; hence the Melnosians feared a bad year of the vine, and were much delighted to find that it was one of the most prolific ever known, a fact which was further confirmed in their eyes by the prophetic red of the rainbow.

Papa Athanasius, the priest of the island, arrayed in the gorgeous sacerdotal vestments of his Church, now came forward, surrounded by a number of acolytes, bearing censers and sacred ichons, in order to pronounce a blessing on the first-fruits of the vine year. The ceremony did not last long, and at its conclusion the Papa retired, while, amid cries of rejoicing and

noisy music, a dozen men with bare feet sprang into the vat and began to tread the grapes. Their white tunics and naked feet were soon stained red with the juice of the vine, which shortly afterwards began to gush freely into the lower vat, amid the songs of the onlookers. Soon afterwards cups of last year's wine were passed round to all present, and, though the Greeks as a rule are a very temperate people, yet the thin, sour liquor speedily rendered them slightly intoxicated, and the singing became more vociferous than ever.

'I hope they will give us some national dances,' said Maurice to Helena, who sat beside him—who looked lovely as the Queen of Love herself.

'Indeed they will!' she answered vivaciously: 'you will see the syrtos, which has a good deal of the Pyrrhic dance in its steps; the moloritis, in which Zoe, Andros, Crispin, and myself will take part. Then there is the dancing on the slippery wine-skin, which is very amusing. See, this is the syrtos!'

A party of young men in their tight-fitting white dancing-costumes now came forward, saluted Caliphronas as the master of the revels, and, placing their arms round one another's necks, began to sway slowly backward and forward, with a kind of mazourka step, to the inspiring music of tabor and pipe. These

evolutions increased in rapidity, and were interspersed with wild acrobatic boundings by single dancers, until Maurice became quite giddy watching their whirlings.

Afterwards the women, linked together with handkerchiefs, in order to make the line more flexible, danced gracefully to a slow melody, with frequent genuflexions and bendings of the head.

‘Greek dances are rather monotonous, I am afraid,’ said Roylands, who found this incessant swaying a trifle wearisome. ‘Why don’t the men and women dance with one another?’

‘They do sometimes, as in the moloritis,’ replied Helena, rising from her seat. ‘We will dance it now, and I think you will like it better than the syrτος.’

It was a graceful dance, and the music was more melodious. First, the four people danced together, then separately, and finally Crispin and Caliphronas indulged in wild saltatory leapings, while Helena and Zoe stood still, swaying from side to side, like nautch dancers.

‘I think a waltz would be jollier than that,’ said Maurice, when she returned to her seat.

‘A waltz! what is that?’ asked Helena innocently.

‘I will show you some time during the day—that is, if we can get any one to play us the music.’

‘Oh, Andronico, that old man with the violin, can pick up anything by ear. But see, we are now going to have some singing!’

A handsome young fellow stepped forward, escorted by a number of women, who joined in the chorus of the song, which was in praise of Dionysius and the vineyards. Maurice, owing to the skilful tuition of Helena, now knew enough Greek to understand the words, which, irregularly translated, were as follows :—

SOLO.

*Oh, my love, we went to the vineyards,
And there beheld bunches of purple vine fruit,
Full of the milk of earth our mother.*

WOMEN.

Wine, like thee, is my heart-gladdener.

SOLO.

*Thro’ the vine leaves peeped St. Dionysius,
Who laughed when he heard the sound of our kisses :
‘ These are not mad with wine,’
So cried St. Dionysius ;
‘ Not with wine are they mad, but with love and kisses.’*

WOMEN.

Wine, like thee, is my heart-gladdener.

There were about twenty verses of this delectable song, interlarded at times with the rude music of the sabouna. Maurice grew tired of this dreariness, and went off, in company with Helena, to where the feast-

ing was going on. Tables were spread out in the open air with cheeses, bread, honey, goats' flesh, piles of grapes, and other rustic dainties, to which the hungry revellers were doing full justice. Some of them were dancing the Smyriote, others singing interminable songs; but Roylands by this time had quite enough of Greek dance and song, so asked Helena to show him the hot springs, which were near at hand.

They were at the base of a little cliff, volcanic in character, with curiously-twisted streaks of red, green, and black lava, which presented a bizarre appearance. The water, owing to the presence of oxide of iron, was of a yellow tint and boiling hot, while occasional puffs of steam rising skyward veiled the variegated tints of the rock behind, so that it looked strangely weird and horrible.

'I wonder you are not afraid to live here, Helena!' said the Englishman, going down on his knees to examine these Ægean geysers. 'I don't believe this crater is an extinct one.'

'It has been quiet enough for over a thousand years,' replied the girl carelessly, 'so I don't see why it should break out now.'

'If it did, the loss of life would be terrible.'

‘Oh, don’t, Maurice! the idea is too frightful. Why, not one of us would escape alive, and then good-bye to father’s idea of a new Athens.’

‘Your new Athens has other things to fear besides volcanoes.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘That if Caliphronas is appointed your father’s heir, it were better for this crater to become full of seething lava once more, than the hot-bed of scoundrels such as that scamp will surely make it.’

‘I don’t think you need be afraid of that,’ replied Helena, with great scorn; ‘Andros is not likely to rule Melnos.’

‘You don’t like him?’

‘I hate him!’

‘And why? He is very handsome.’

‘Do you think I am a woman likely to be taken with mere good looks in a man?’ she answered, with an angry light in her eyes. ‘I thought you knew me better than that, Maurice.’

‘Forgive me, Helena; but indeed I am glad you do not like Caliphronas.’

Helena knew the reason of this pointed remark, and, looking down with a blush, was about to reply, when the man they were talking about came quickly

along the narrow path, with a savage scowl on his handsome face.

‘Helena, your father is asking for you,’ he said abruptly.

‘Oh, I will go at once,’ replied the girl lightly, in order to conceal her confusion; and rapidly left the spot, where Caliphronas still remained looking angrily at Maurice.

The Englishman saw that the Count was in a terrible rage, and ready to overwhelm him with invective, but, nevertheless, was not sorry to come to a complete understanding with this treacherous scamp, who had no regard for truth, honour, or daring. Caliphronas was a thorough bully by nature; and, having succeeded in browbeating his own countrymen by arrogance, thought he would try the same plan with Maurice, quite unaware that the seemingly easy-going young man was made of sterner stuff than yielding Hellenes, and would hold his own against all odds with true British doggedness.

‘Well, Bacchus,’ said Maurice, trying to pass the matter off lightly at first, ‘why have you deserted your revellers?’

‘To punish a scoundrel,’ burst out the furious Greek, stamping his foot.

Maurice looked around serenely ; and then, sitting down on a block of black lava, streaked with sulphur, began to roll a cigarette, which innocent proceeding irritated Caliphronas beyond all powers of self-control.

‘Do you hear me?’ he cried, mad with rage. ‘I came here to punish a scoundrel!’

In a quarrel the victory is generally to him who keeps his temper, as Maurice knew very well ; so, in this case, the more enraged grew the Greek, the calmer became the Englishman.

‘So I see,’ he replied phlegmatically ; ‘but, as I see no scoundrel here but yourself, I hardly understand you.’

‘Understand this, Mr. Maurice—you are the scoundrel!’

‘Really!’ said Roylands, lighting his cigarette with provoking coolness ; ‘and your reason for applying such a name to me?’

‘You make love to the lady who is to be my wife.’

‘I was not aware your offer of marriage had been accepted.’

‘I have her father’s consent.’

‘True ; but you have not the lady’s consent.’

‘Bah! what of that? Women and dogs are born to obey.’

‘My dear Count Constantine Caliphronas,’ said Maurice deliberately, ‘you have called me a scoundrel, for which epithet, coming from a despicable wretch like yourself, I care nothing. But if you dare to speak disrespectfully of Miss Helena, I will certainly throw you into that boiling spring over there.’

The Greek was young, strong, and athletic, and could doubtless have held his own against the Englishman to a considerable extent,—although he would have been beaten in the end, owing to his ignorance of boxing, an art in which Maurice excelled,—but so craven was his soul that he did not dare to resent this calmly insulting speech, but merely stood his ground quivering with fury.

‘*Và!*’ he hissed through his clenched teeth, and shaking five fingers at Maurice, which is about the strongest imprecation a Greek can use. ‘I will be even with you, pig, English as you are!’

‘I see you want pitching into that stream,’ replied Maurice, rising. ‘You dare to apply such another epithet to me, and, as sure as I stand here, in you go.’

Caliphronas trembled with mingled fear and rage, for he had seen the man before him box with Boat-

swain Dick, and knew he had but small chance against such pugilistic science. He was as careful of his beauty as a lady, and dreaded lest some sledge-hammer blow should mar his perfect features, therefore he deemed it wise to restrain his temper, and laughed derisively.

‘Bah! to-day for you, to-morrow for me,’ he said jeeringly. ‘You cannot hold yourself against the future ruler of Melnos. I will have the island and Helena! You will have nothing.’

‘Don’t be too sure of that, Caliphronas! I don’t want Melnos, but I certainly do want Helena, and shall certainly refuse to give her up without a struggle.’

‘Try!’ sneered the Greek, snapping his fingers under Roylands’ nose; ‘try!’

Hitherto Maurice had kept his temper well under control; but this last insult was too much, so, lifting up the light frame of the Greek in his athletic grasp, in spite of his struggles, he calmly sent him splash into the nearest pool, which was fortunately but tepid in character, otherwise the Count might have run a chance of being parboiled.

‘Next time you dare to use your vile tongue on me, I will sling you down the grand staircase,’ said

Maurice quietly; then, without waiting to hear the bad language of his enemy, calmly strolled away towards the scene of the festival, smoking with great enjoyment.

Caliphronas, considerably cowed, crawled out of the pool, looking like a drowned rat; and few would have recognised in this despicable object the daring, handsome Hermes of the morning. Had he possessed a knife, he would certainly have pursued Maurice, and done his best to kill him; but, being without a weapon, he had a wholesome dread of the Englishman's fists, so, swallowing his rage for the time being, went off in search of dry garments.

As Maurice approached the vineyard, he heard shouts of laughter, and found it was owing to the latest amusement, that of dancing on the slippery surface of a skin of wine,—a pastime as old as the days of the Dionysia itself. Many skilful dancers fell off; and it was long before any one succeeded in carrying off the prize, which was the skin of wine itself; but ultimately it fell to the lot of the handsome young Palikar who had sung the song about St. Dionysius.

Helena looked apprehensively at him when he appeared, as she was afraid there had been a quarrel

between her two suitors; but Maurice calmed her fears by a smile, and together they watched a sailor's hornpipe danced by Dick to the music supplied by old Andronico, who had picked up the air from Gurt's whistling.

Justinian was in ecstasies over the dance, and made Dick sing some sea-songs, which, with the rude but tuneful chorus of his messmates, made the old man's eyes flash with patriotic fire.

'I'm only Greek on the surface, you see,' he said to Crispin, with a somewhat sad smile; 'but my heart is English still.'

'Hearts of oak!' replied Crispin gaily. 'After all, there is no place like England; for you see Melnos, with all its tropical loveliness, is still unsatisfying when memories of white-cliffed Albion awaken in your heart.'

'Bravo, Crispin!' cried Maurice, who had heard this speech; 'you are a true patriot, and must confirm your views by singing "Home, sweet Home."'

Crispin, nothing loath, did so; and the Greeks, attracted by the beautiful air, crowded round to listen. The darkness was falling fast, for the long day was nearly at an end, and through the still night

sounded the liquid notes of a cock nightingale calling to his mate; but higher than the voice of the bird arose that tender old melody, which brings tears to the eyes of those absent from their own fireside. Justinian, leaning his white head on his hand, listened intently; and when the song was ended, Maurice could have sworn in the dim light that a sudden tear flashed like a jewel down his withered cheek. It was extraordinary to see this man of iron, astute, keen ruler as he was, so touched by the simple little song, which he had heard perchance at his mother's knee; and from that moment Maurice always believed in Justinian, who he was certain must have a good heart, when so affected by that pleading air.

Torches were now brought, the wild music burst out anew, and the revellers prepared to escort their Demarch back to the Acropolis. Caliphronas, apparently as merry as ever, made his appearance in new clothes, and resumed his sceptre and vineleaf crown. Along the street danced the procession, with clash of cymbal and throb of drum; torches flaring in the windless air on the excited faces of their bearers; and it was like a confused dream, with the flash of white robes, the tossing red lights,

the barbaric pomp, and the swaying, restless, dancing crowd.

At the foot of the grand staircase, Maurice burst out laughing.

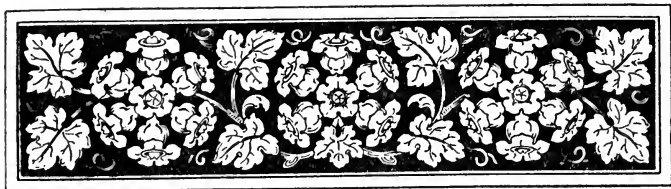
‘What is the matter?’ asked Crispin, who walked near him.

‘I am thinking of Caliphronas, whom I flung into one of the hot springs.’

‘The deuce you did! It’s a pity he was not drowned.’

‘He is not born to be drowned,’ retorted Roylands sardonically; ‘he is born to be hanged.’

At the Acropolis the Bacchanalians left them; and they saw the long procession stream like a serpent of light along the road, down the staircase, with glimmer of white robes and distant sounds of mirth. A last flash of innumerable torches, a last burst of frenzied mirth, then darkness and quiet—the Dionysia was ended.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THESPIAN.

*The silvery smoothness of sweet Sophocles,
The rolling thunder of Æschylean verse,
The subtle twistings of Euripides*

*To prove the better reason by the worse ;—
Such poets gained the light Athenian's praise
By daring dealings with the universe,*

*And yearly won the envied crown of bays ;
But not on Attic shores alone,—for we
Yet know their greatness in these modern days,*

*In alien lands across the stormy sea,
Where with much painful learning do we dare
In pristine splendour to revive the three,*

*Till, foiled by antique genius high and rare,
We quit the task with unalloyed despair.*



THE theatre of Melnos was crowded the next day to witness the one performance of the year, and the whole semicircle of seats was occupied by a chattering throng, resembling, doubtless, the gossip-loving Athenians of old. All

were in gala dresses, the men brilliant in Albanian costumes of fustanelli, embroidered jackets, gaudy gaiters, and vivid red silk sashes; while the women, in accordance with the edict of the Demarch, still wore their graceful, antique robes of white; indeed, the male bird here had the more splendid plumage of the two, but what the female lacked in colour, she made up for in grace. The population of Melnos were, indeed, fine specimens of humanity, as, owing to the selective genius of Justinian, none but the physically perfect were admitted to the privileges of the island, and in the case of births he exercised an almost Spartan rigour. Certainly he departed so far from the laws of Lycurgus as to permit any child born with a blemish to live, but it was sent away from Melnos at the moment of its birth, and provided for elsewhere. In consequence, therefore, of this untiring care in such matters, the Melnosians were all strong, healthy, and beautiful; while their constant out-door life and congenial occupations kept them in a wonderfully vitalised condition, which was eminently calculated to constitute a race as physically perfect in form and health as is possible on this earth.

‘I am a great believer in the *mens sana in corpore sano* theory,’ said the Demarch to Maurice, who sat

beside him. 'The first law of this new Athens is, that all the citizens shall be healthy in every way; and the body being thus perfected by degrees, who knows but what the intellect may not ripen the sooner to the first-fruits of genius?'

'Is that not rather against the Homeric line you quoted the other day, sir?' observed Maurice thoughtfully. 'I mean as regards Caliphronas; he is physically perfect, thoroughly healthful, and yet you can hardly call him intellectual.'

'Andros,' said Justinian emphatically, 'is not a true Greek, but a mongrel from the island of that name, where I found him a shepherd lad. I have no faith in mixed races, as their genius, if they have any, is apt to be confusing. We English are essentially a mixed race, therefore our literature, although marked by great versatility, lacks that dominant note which denotes the special characteristic of a pure-blooded race. Look at the Jew and the Hellene, which are, perhaps, the sole examples of unmixed blood we have,—at least in the West,—and you will see that their works of genius, however different in outward form, are still instinct with the individuality of their particular race-nature. The Psalms of David, the tragedies of the Greek dramatists, could only have

been written by men of unmixed blood, steeped in the colour of their peculiar branch of the human family.'

'What about Shakespeare?'

'None but a mixed race could have produced an all-comprehensive mind like his ; and though you may perhaps think me narrow in desiring the formation of pure-blooded nations, which may be barren of such versatile genius, yet, believe me, Maurice, every plant should bear its own natural flowers. Now, my Melnosians have been carefully selected from the most untainted blood of the insular Greeks, who are the real survivors of the old Attic stock. I allow no mixed marriages—I protect them from all outward influence—I encourage them to develop their inherent characteristics of race, so, in all human probability, they, in years to come, will produce a blossom of genius entirely their own.'

'Is that not rather a hothouse forcing style?'

'Well, yes ; but such artificiality is needed in these days of easy communication and cosmopolitan races. The tribes of mankind are not now isolated each from each, as in former times, when that very isolation forced them, uninfluenced by contact with alien tribes, to develop their own special race-nature in literature, music, and art. Mixed races produce mixed results,

splendid, I own, in many cases, but not so severely unique and classic as would be the case with untamed tribes.'

'Did not Disraeli discuss this question in *Coningsby*?'

'Touching the Semitic race,—yes, I think so; but it is so long since I have read the book that I almost forget his line of argument. But we have strayed from our subject, which was physical and not intellectual perfection; and I verily believe that if as much attention was given to the breeding of humanity as is to the rearing of race-horses, the race of mankind would be much benefited thereby.'

Justinian had quite a mania regarding this question of race, and Maurice would gladly have continued the interesting argument, but the play was shortly about to begin, so he deferred the discussion until a more fitting occasion, and meanwhile examined the theatre with careful attention.

The stage facing the semicircle was long and narrow, with slender columns on either side supporting the pediment, which, unfortunately, was quite plain, as Justinian's theories had not yet developed a Pheidias to sculpture the red limestone into god-like forms of hero and deity. A broad flight of steps led

downward to the orchestra, which had entrances to the right and left for the convenience of the chorus ; while a veritable altar of Dionysius, wreathed with sculptured grapes and nude figures of dancing faun and nymph, taken, doubtless, from some ruined temple, stood on a raised platform fronting the stage, and on it burned a small fire, whereon incense was occasionally flung.

‘ Is that not rather pagan ? ’ asked Maurice, referring to the altar.

‘ Everything herein is ideal, not real,’ replied the Demarch wisely. ‘ When you see the chorus throw incense on the altar, think not that they are sacrificing to the wine-god of their ancestors. No, they are all of the Orthodox Church, and obey devoutly the precepts of Papa Athanasius ; but I like to carry out the old ceremonies, even to this altar, which means nothing, and is highly characteristic of the antique festival.’

As Crispin, Helena, and Caliphronas were all actors for the day, the Demarch and Maurice sat alone in the centre of the semicircle, surrounded by the sailors, who were much puzzled at the strangeness of this stately, open-air theatre, so different from the air-tight boxes to which they had been accustomed in London.

‘ If it was only an Adelphi melodrama ! ’ said Dick,

whose inclinations leaned to the bloodthirsty play ;
'but I suppose it will be something like that squalling
they called singing yesterday.'

'Or a moosic 'all,' observed Gurt, chewing his
quid reflectively. 'I seed a gal in one of 'em down
Wappin' way as guv a song called, "Tap me on the
shoulder, Bill." My eyes! but it were a good un,
that 'ere.'

Decidedly this unique dramatic representation,
which many English scholars would have beheld with
delight, was quite thrown away on these conservative
tars, who preferred melodrama and comic songs to the
solemn splendours of ancient tragedy, which was, natur-
ally enough, Greek to them in more senses than one.

In accordance with the instructions of Justinian,
the poet had composed a play embodying an allegory
of the aims of this island colony of Melnos, and, for-
saking to a great extent the severe classicism of
Æschylean tragedy, had modelled his drama on the
loose-flying splendours of Shelley's Hellas. This
piece, entitled 'The Phoenix,' was intended to repre-
sent the degradation of Greece under the Turkish
yoke, her escape from such bondage, her material
civilisation, and her subsequent rise to intellectual
supremacy, which end the formation of the colony of

Melnos was supposed to foster. Crispin had no fear of his allegorical drama not being understood by his audience, for the Greeks are a singularly keen-witted people, and, besides, Justinian had so imbued the whole population with his hopes of reviving the ancient glories of the Athenian genius, that all present were quite able to comprehend the hidden meaning of the play. 'The Phoenix' was to occupy the whole morning, and, after an interval of two hours for rest and refreshment, the satiric pendant to the more solemn piece was to be represented in the afternoon, consisting, in this instance, of a local incident, developed and expanded by Crispin into a wild Aristophanic farce, blending wit with irony, laughter with tears, and stately chorus with clownish play of rustic actors.

Crispin, moreover, was not only author, actor, and stage manager, but also an accomplished musician, therefore had made use of his Western training in this respect to get together an orchestra, and, with the aid of Andronico, had adapted the plaintive music of the Hellenic folk-songs to his choruses. The quick-eared Greeks speedily picked up the airs, many of which they already knew, and thus the drama followed closely in the footsteps of its Athenian prototype ;

and the wild, rude music, sounding at intervals between the long speeches of the principal characters, prevented the monotony which otherwise would have certainly prevailed. With violin, flute, pipe, drum, cymbals, and sabouna, the musicians therefore took their places unseen by the audience; for Crispin, adopting Wágnér's theory, did not want the attention of his audience distracted in any way by the presence of the orchestra between stage and auditorium.

The back of the stage represented a smooth white marble wall, fronted by a range of Corinthian pillars wreathed with milky blossoms, and in the centre, great folding doors ready to be flung open when required by the exigencies of the play. Against this absolutely colourless background moved the brilliant figures of the performers in measured fashion, with stately gestures, as moved those serene, side-faced figures on the marble urn dreamed of by Keats. The clear light of the sun burned on the great half-circle of eager faces with steady effulgence, and left in delicate shadow that wide white stage, whereon was to be enacted a drama such as we in England, lacking all things necessary to such colossal majesty, can never hope to see.

All being ready, the curtain arose, or rather fell, for

Crispin, with strict fidelity to Athenian usages, had adopted this curious mode of withdrawing the veil between audience and performers.

The stage is empty, but a wild chant sounds in the distance, and a long train of Moslems, headed by their Sultan, sweeps in, bearing with them Hellas, a captive in her own land to the barbaric power. Helena, draped in black and manacled with chains, represented Hellas, who stands with melancholy mien amid the gaudily-dressed chorus of Moslems, listening to their songs of triumph over her downfall. 'We have chained you to our chariot,' they sing tauntingly, 'yet thou need'st not look so downcast, for a slave hast thou been before, and a slave thou wilt be hereafter. Thy shrines, thy palaces, thy city walls have fallen, and fallen too art thou.'

The chorus having ended their exulting strains, the Sultan addresses Hellas, and offers to make her his wife, thus incorporating the ancient land of loveliness with the newly constructed power of the Turk; but Hellas, who is Athena incarnate, scorns his offer to make her an odalisque of the harem. 'Virgin I was, virgin I am, virgin I remain,' says the fallen queen, with haughty grace; 'my body you may chain with iron, but the soul is under the protection of Zeus, the

Supreme; therefore will I sit here in desolation rather than partake of the splendours you offer me.' Furious with rage, the barbarian smites her, but she, still smiling, repeats constantly, 'The body is thine, but the soul is mine;' so in wrath he leaves her, with a promise that her woes shall never end, and the Moslem chorus follow him from the stage, with triumphant shouts of joy at the success of their arms.

Left alone, chained and desolate, amid the ruins of her temples, Hellas bewails her downfall, which contrasts so darkly with her former brilliance in classic times. Crispin afterwards translated the play into blank verse for the benefit of Maurice, but the English verse gives but a poor idea of the fire and majesty of the sonorous Greek original. 'Woe is me!' cries the fallen queen—

*For I am but the sport of jealous gods,
Who, envious of Athenian gloriousness,
Have crushed the City of the Violet Crown
Beneath the force of overwhelming hordes;
Thus blotting out my heaven-aspiring sons,
Who, burning with a new Promethean fire,
Would fain have scaled god-crowned Olympus high,
To match themselves 'gainst gods in equal strife.*

Then, with the sudden energy of despair, she calls upon the heroes of Salamis, of Thermopylæ, of Marathon, to aid their mother in the time of need. Alas!

no voice answers to her cry of anguish, and, overcome with a sense of hopelessness, Hellas, discrowned and chained, sinks weeping on the broken column of her fallen shrine.

Now enters the chorus proper of young Greek maidens, dressed in black stoles, to denote the sorrowful condition of their country. They sweep into the orchestra, and, having sprinkled the altar with incense, begin to question their fallen queen, as though they were ignorant of the cause of her grief.

CHORUS.

What madness drives thee, queen, to rend thine hair?

HELLAS.

Curst Ate bides upon the threshold stone.

CHORUS.

Now see I plainly thou art bound with chains.

HELLAS.

In this no fatal blindness dims thine eyes.

CHORUS.

Say whence these chains which check free-moving limbs?

HELLAS.

The Eastern hordes have bound me helpless thus.

Question and answer thus goes on for some time, and then the chorus break out into a wailing song, in which they remind Hellas that, having forsaken the old gods who helped her in her need, she is now reaping the reward of such folly. 'The curse of Ate

is on thee,' they cry pitifully, 'nor will the goddess be satisfied until she has exacted her due penalty for neglect of the Olympians.' They relate the former woes of Hellas; how she was first slave to the Macedonians, then to the Roman power; how the Latins set their mailed feet on her neck; and now the Moslems have again reduced her to the position of bondswoman. Ever a slave, ever desired, she is thrown from the one to the other, as it pleases them, unable to free herself from such degradation. When this chorus of reproach is ended, Hellas calls upon the tutelar genius of Greece to help her ere she perish.

In answer to her cry, Apollo (represented by Caliphronas) appears, and blames her for foolishly forsaking the old gods for the new, and thus falling into the hands of Nemesis. His power, which was engendered and kept alive solely by belief, has departed, and he cannot help her, much as he desires to do so. 'I myself,' he says—

*E'en I whose fanes were ever revered,
Am now bereft of shrine and oracle;
No longer do I hear the Delian hymn,
Nor taste the savours of the sacrifice,
But, lyre in hand, go wandering through the night,
Lamenting for my skyey chariot,
Wherein I bore the fierceness of the sun
Up eastern hills and down to western seas.*

Finally, Apollo tells his renegade worshipper that she must sing the battle-songs of Tyrtæus, which may perhaps awaken thoughts of freedom in the breasts of her degenerate sons, and then departs, promising to return again when she is once more the stainless Hellas of old. Fired by the speech of the god, Hellas rises, and, assisted by the chorus, begins to sing fierce battle-songs, and call upon her sons to remember the heroes of the past. A clamour is heard without as of men fighting, then the chains of Hellas fall off, and with them her dark robe. Now she is free once more, and clad in purest white, so, while rejoicing in her liberty, a herald (Crispin) appears, and tells how well the Greeks have fought for their independence. This gave the poet an opportunity for a stirring speech, descriptive of the modern Greek heroes, Canaris, Bozartis, and Conduriottis, which names were received with shouts by the audience, fired with patriotic fervour.

Once more Apollo, the genius of Greece, appears, and declares that no longer can Hellas dwell in desecrated Athens, but that, even as his mother Latona, she must seek shelter in an Ægean isle, and there, after long years, give birth to a supreme race, who will revive the ancient glories of violet-crowned Athens. Leading her by the hand, the god then con-

ducts the newly liberated Hellas up the steps of the temple. The great doors are flung open to the sound of trumpets ; and lo ! appears the Acropolis of Melnos in all its beauty. Here is Hellas to dwell in seclusion, until her antique glory is revived by a new race of her sons, instinct with genius ; and down the steps come many white-robed youths and girls, bearing fruits, to welcome this Phoenix of Greece, new risen from the ashes of the past. Then the chorus, wreathing in a mystic dance round the altar of Bacchus, sing the coming glories of New Hellas, which are soon to be realised in the Island of Melnos.

CHORUS.

*Long, long hast thou lain as in prison, our mother, our goddess, our queen,
But lo ! to the eastward hath risen a splendour serene,
And glorious day follows darkness, the darkness of hundreds of years,
Reviving thy corpse from its starkness, with laughter and tears,
Ay, tears for the past and its anguish, and laughter for glories to come,
For never again wilt thou languish, a bondswoman dumb.
The trumpets of triumph are blowing, their clangour swells north
from thy south,
And jubilant music is flowing anew from thy mouth.
Man, dazzled, obedient shall render his homage to thee as of yore,
And thou wilt stand forth in thy splendour, a goddess once more.*

After this introductory chant in unison, the chorus divided in twain, and semi-chorus replied to semi-chorus, in fiery speech and jubilant music, that rang like a pæan through the wide theatre. Ever moving

figures, kneeling youths and maidens, soft radiance of sunlight, and triumphant bursts of choral song, while Hellas, serene in her freedom, stands beside her tutelary genius, with the light of the glorious future on her face, listening to the eagle flight of liquid words, greeting her as queen of the world.

The play being ended, all the lively Greeks streamed out of the theatre, loudly praising the entertainment, and, having had an intellectual feast, now proceeded to the tables set in the open air, which were covered with all kinds of food to satisfy their physical wants. Maurice and the Demarch waited in the theatre alone for the actors, and very shortly Crispin came to see how they liked his play. He received warm congratulations on his success from the two men, while Helena and Caliphronas also received their due meed of praise. The Greek was radiant with self-complacent delight, for his vanity had been much gratified by the approval of the audience, and for the rest of the day he regarded himself as the hero of the hour, quite forgetting both Crispin and Helena in his serene egotism.

‘I hope I have succeeded in showing your aims clearly, Justinian?’ said the poet, as they sat down to a comfortable meal.

‘You have succeeded admirably, especially in that last chorus. I only hope that all will see the piece is meant for more than the amusement of an hour.’

‘If you heard how the villagers are talking,’ remarked Caliphronas, with a laugh, ‘I do not think you would have any doubt on that score, for they already regard themselves as the saviours of Heïlas, intellectually, physically, and politically.’

‘Did you intend your genius of Greece for Lord Byron, Crispin?’ asked Maurice, who had understood and admired the allegory.

‘Well, the character was supposed to blend both the god and the poet,’ replied Crispin, after a pause; ‘let us say it was the Olympian incarnate in the body of the Englishman.’

‘And both the Olympian and Englishman incarnate in a Greek,’ said the Demarch graciously.

Caliphronas smiled at receiving this compliment, which was intended to further blind him to the reality of Justinian’s feelings towards him.

‘There is nothing I should like better than to become a leader in reality,’ he said gaily; ‘to inspire my countrymen with the desire of once more making Hellas supreme queen of the world.’

‘Of the intellectual world?’

‘Or the material—it matters not which.’

‘Pardon me, but it matters a great deal,’ replied Justinian quickly. ‘Politically, Greece has a place among the Powers—she has a constitution and a king. Therefore, so far as material prosperity goes, I wish not to meddle with her; but my aim is to revive her intellectuality, and Crispin’s play was entirely written to illustrate that point. Hellas will never be a modern Roman empire—she never was an all-conquering power, and her strength lay in the brains, not in the hands of her sons. After all, is it not greater to control the minds than the bodies of men?’

‘You want to turn Hellas into a school.’

‘The pen is mightier than the sword,’ rejoined Justinian sententiously. ‘Let other nations be merchants and warriors, while Greece reasserts her ancient vocation of teacher. An aptitude for a special line is as true of the many as of the one. You would not give the lyre to the soldier nor the sword to the poet, so every race should exercise the talents with which it is especially gifted; not, of course, to the exclusion of others, but make its peculiar gift its greatest aim. At present, the great human family of Europe is in a state of transition, and, unaware of each other’s aims, are watchfully in

arms the one against the other. Let us hope that before the end of the twentieth century they will recognise that one special faculty predominates in every nation, and permit each other to cultivate that special faculty.'

'What!' exclaimed Maurice, somewhat astonished, 'would you have the English nothing but shopkeepers and colonisers—the French, a nation of warriors—the Germans, philosophers only, and the Italians, musicians? That, indeed, would narrow down the talents of the world to one special field each.'

'You do not understand me, Maurice,' said Justinian impatiently. 'I quite agree that every nation should have its own literature, art, music, philosophy, and drama, but the one special gift of the race should be cultivated more than the others; it should be made a state law—a political necessity. However, this question admits of much argument, and we have no time to argue now; but, in illustration that I am not so narrow-minded as you think, I will merely point out that I educate my Greeks in military and civil occupations quite as much as I attend to their intellectuality.'

'After all,' said Caliphronas pointedly, 'only civil occupations, such as touch agriculture, are necessary;

for intellectuality is yet in the future with us, and it is not likely Melnos will ever require to resort to arms.'

'I trust not,' replied Justinian, looking steadily at the Count. 'But if she does, I am quite sure you will find her sons able to defend their island, even against enmity and treachery.'

Caliphronas smiled uneasily, and held his peace, upon which there ensued a rather embarrassing pause, which was only ended by the departure of Crispin to look after the afternoon's entertainment. Maurice strolled off in the pleasant company of Helen, much to the disgust of Caliphronas, who now pointedly avoided the company of the Englishman, owing to the fracas which had occurred during the previous day. Truth to tell, Roylands was pleased with such avoidance, as, now that open war was declared between himself and the Greek, he had no need to cloak his distaste for the society of this precious scamp.

The satiric comedy of 'The Honey Bees,' was a fantastic piece based upon an incident which had lately occurred in Melnos. Justinian had lately imported a potter to teach his people the ceramic art, but this new acquisition turned out to be but an idle scoundrel, who spent his time in drinking and

making love to his neighbours' wives.' On this basis the poet had worked out an amusing plot, not devoid of point, in which Aristides, an idle scamp, forces himself into an industrious hive of honey bees, whose queen he desires to marry, in order to be independent for the rest of his life. Unfortunately, he falls a victim to a counter-plot of the bees themselves, who, in order to disillusionise the queen, get a pretty young girl called Myrtis to pay court to the adventurer. He makes love to Myrtis, and is discovered by the enraged queen, who orders her bees to drive him forth from the hive.

This slight framework was filled with pointed allusions to passing events, and the weaknesses of many of the Melnosians were slyly pointed out, so that the gossip-loving audience enjoyed every stinging remark to the full, nor, indeed, failed to laugh when the irony was directed at themselves. The scene was the public square of the village, with the lake and the bronze statue of Jupiter, so that, with such a well-known setting, every local point was understood and applauded. The chorus consisted of the 'Honey Bees,' dressed somewhat after the fashion of Aristophanic Wasps, with pinched waists, yellow black-banded bodies, and spears for stings.

Alternating with the rude buffoonery of the play, were bursts of choric song lauding the community of Melnos and the industry of its inhabitants, with many sly hits at the idle lives of the adjacent islanders. In fact, with great judgment the poet had constructed the whole comedy to glorify the Melnosians at the expense of their neighbours, and thus render them the more resolved to work hard at their appointed tasks, and thus fulfil the aims of the Demarch.

The following scene of the arrival of Aristides and the entrance of the chorus will give some idea of the play, though, of course, what with local allusions and the flexibility of the Greek language, the comedy is more amusing in the original.

ARISTIDES. *O Pan, to what land of honey have I come ! Truly, I see naught but wild thyme and yellow comb. Poseidon, hast thou then girdled Hymettus with the azure scarf of ocean ?*

QUEEN. *No hill of Attic fame do you here behold, but the sky-piercing Melnos, beloved of the gods.*

ARISTIDES. *Jupiter ! I behold a graceful creature. Have I then been thrown on the alluring coast of fatal Circe ?*

QUEEN. *Sun-god's daughter I am not, but one who rules over honey-seeking bees in this hollow island. Cleverly do they extract the sweet juices of flowers to fill the emptiness of many-celled combs.*

ARISTIDES. (running away). *Ah me! I fear the sharpness of their stings.*

QUEEN. *In no wise will they hurt thee save at my behest. Be still, O handsome stranger, and I will invoke for thee the industrious tribe, whose ambrosia is sweeter than the food of undying gods.*

ARISTIDES. *Already I shake in my cowardly knees.*

QUEEN. *O Pan, inspirer of vague fears, do I call on thee to send hither the swift-flying bees. Whether ye lurk in honey-throated flowers industrious, or speed lightly through the measureless sky, do I summon ye hither, O sting-bearers.*

ENTER CHORUS OF BEES.

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

*Indeed I heard thy cry, O queen,
When seeking on a mount serene
Sweet-tasting honey for our store,
Drawn from the core
Of rose and daisy, violet,
In sparkling dews of meadows set,
With patient labour do I strive
To fill the hive,
Alas! too often plundered, when
Espied by all-devouring men.*

Buzz ! Buzz ! Buzz !

But lo ! whom see I lurking here ?

The form of man, whom much I fear.

Buz—z—z—z—z !

Let me prepare my angry sting

To slay this greedy-passioned thing,

Who would devour

Our honey in a single hour.

Buz—z—z—z—z.

The audience, lovers of laughter as they were, much preferred this amusing play to the solemn teachings of the morning, and yet from both they learned something necessary to their well-being. From the one, how Justinian wished to make them the centre of a new intellectual force ; and by means of the other he desired to show how his aim could be achieved by industry and perseverance : so, grave or gay, the performances instilled the policy of the Demarch into their minds.

On the conclusion of the comedy, the rest of the evening was devoted to feasting, while Justinian and his guests returned to the Acropolis, well pleased with the success of the performances.

‘Well, what do you think of my sermons from the stage ?’ asked Crispin, as he strolled along beside Maurice. .

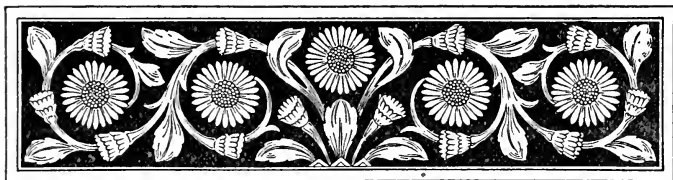
‘I think very highly of them,’ answered the Englishman. ‘It is a pity we dare not be so out-

spoken in our own land. But if you set forth the foibles of Londoners as plainly as you did in "The Honey Bees," I am afraid you would have half a dozen libel cases.'

'It would be impossible to transplant the Aristophanic comedy to England, for modern civilisation is too complicated to admit of such free speaking. Besides, the average Briton is too serious and too practical to relish the truth, even when uttered by the comic muse, and only the light-hearted Athenians could have appreciated and enjoyed such plain speaking. The French are more given to open criticism, and I daresay a political comedy constructed on these lines would appeal greatly to their sense of humour.'

'When one is in Rome, one must not speak evil of the Pope!'

'And every nation has its pope of conventionality. I agree with you there. After all, it is impossible to revive the past, and even a new Shakespeare would be as out of place in these post-revolutionary days as a new Aristophanes. The modern world deals with the drama of little things, and the individual idiosyncrasy is caricatured instead of the national policy. We have only one plain-speaking Aristophanes nowadays, and his name is *Punch*.'



CHAPTER XXV.

OLYMPIAN.

*Like statues fair the naked runners stand,
Poised for the start on Elis' sacred plain,
Their limbs resplendent shine with fragrant oil,
And every eager athlete is fain
To win the wreath of olives for his toil,
In honour of his land.*

*Like flying arrows from a stretchèd bow,
They onward speed with every muscle strained.
A breathless pause—then shouts to heaven go
In token of the victory hardly gained.*

*A triple cry of 'Hail, Victorious!' sounds;
With dance and choral song the victor goes
To bend before the statue of the god.
Then one with glad rejoicing proudly throws
A robe of triumph o'er his shoulders broad,
And with wild olives crowned,
The athlete unconquered, in his state
Waits silent in the awful god's abode
To hear, with pride of victory elate,
The rushing splendour of Pindaric ode.*



WING to the comparatively small size of the valley, which was much taken up with the dwelling-houses, manufactories, and public buildings, the place wherein the yearly games

took place was not very large. Still, with a sparse population, the arena served well enough, and when all were assembled it was comfortably filled, leaving a large open space in the centre for the runners, leapers, boxers, and other athletes who took part in the sports. Despite his dislike to anachronisms, Justinian was obliged to deviate from the special sports of Elis, and introduce a number of modern pastimes, in order to keep his men in an efficient state of training for the defence of the island. To this end, shooting matches were arranged, and the Demarch supplied the Melnosians with guns for the day, which were afterwards returned to the armoury of the Acropolis, and many of the villagers were excellent marksmen. Justinian also, who appeared to know something of military tactics, drilled and manœuvred his men in fine style ; and last, but not least, Gurt, who was an old man-of-war's man, had taught a special number the cutlass drill of the British navy.

The arena was a large open space near the grand staircase, surrounded with many trees of the beech, elm, pine, and plane genus ; and thus, to some extent, shaded the ground agreeably from the sun, which beat fiercely down at noonday. There was no amphitheatre, but rows of stone benches on which the

women could seat themselves, while their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers stood around, or lay luxuriously on the grass. Justinian himself, however, had a kind of stone throne, rudely carved, and all his guests were supplied with seats adjacent, so that they could view the games quite comfortably. The athletes were clothed in their tight-fitting dancing costumes, which gave free play to their bodies, and were comfortably cool, while their feet alone were bare, so as not to impede their speed in the racing. On this final day of the festival the colours changed sexes, for most of the men were garbed in white for the sports, while the women, decking their snowy chitons with brilliant ribbons and gold coins, wreathed their dark locks with fragrant chaplets of dewy flowers.

Only Helena was in pure white—Helena, who sat near her father like a queen, and wore a robe the hue of milk, a snowy wreath of delicate cyclamen, yet who looked the fairest of all the fair women assembled. In spite of the attractions, vine-feast and goat-song, which had occupied the two previous days, these Olympian games were the favourites with the lively Melnosians, as all could take part in them, and win the praise of the Demarch and the smiles of the women, both of which were

greatly flattering to the harmless vanity of the Greek nature.

Maurice, in common with Crispin, was arrayed in the white wool athletic dress, as Caliphronas had challenged him to compete in jumping, and for the honour of his country he accepted the glove so insultingly thrown down. Insultingly, because Caliphronas, confident in his superb physical perfection, had taunted the Englishman with not being able to hold his own in athletic sports, save in boxing, which taunt had stung Maurice so much, that he had wagered himself against Caliphronas in the high jump. At college, Maurice had been a famous athlete, and though many years of idleness in London had impaired his powers, yet the pure atmosphere of Melnos, the constant open-air life of mountain-climbing and swimming had completely reinvigorated him; and what he lacked of his former skill was counterbalanced by the endurance of his spare frame, the hardness of his muscles, and his general feeling of exuberant vitality. He was all in white, save for the colours of his college, and a wreath of red roses, which Helena had woven round his grey sombrero, in which head-gear he looked like the Sicilian shepherd, Acis, when he went a-courting Galatea by the sea.

Seated by Justinian, they all watched the progress of the games with great interest, which was fully shared by their surrounding guard of sailors, who thought this festival the most sensible of the three. All the ambitious mariners had entered themselves for every game, running, wrestling, leaping, boxing, and shooting; nor did they fail to uphold the honour of England, for if the Greeks had the speed, the Britons had the strength, and, in their dogged determination that an Englishman could not be beaten, managed to secure a respectable number of victories over the nimble-stepping islanders.

‘I think I like the games best myself,’ said Justinian, as he surveyed the races from his throne, like one of the old Olympian Hellanodikai; ‘for I know that strength is what Melnos now requires from her sons. Amusement and intellectuality are in the future; but, with the chances of a probable war, we need as many skilled athletes and trained soldiers as possible.’

‘I notice you make everything subservient to your schemes,’ observed Maurice, who every day was more and more impressed with the administrative capabilities of the Demarch.

‘Of course. I think the entire life of a people

should be the means to an end, and thus, while able to live healthfully, mirthfully, and intellectually, they will be capable of guarding themselves in times of danger.'

'Quite like Sparta!'

'No; I have told you I never did approve of Spartan severity, which, destroying the individuality of every man, turned the nation into nothing but a warlike machine. A plant will not grow in a pot too small for it, nor will a child constantly confined in swaddling clothes develop its physical nature freely. Mankind requires four things,—amusement, education, work, and physical exercise; and on these requirements I base my system of rule. All the year round, my people work for the well-being of the community, and these festivals, although they please them, are not without their objects. The first day is the pure amusement only of the vintage feast; during the second day, I educate their minds to understand the reason of their existence; and now, on this third day, they indulge in physical exercises, which keeps them healthy, and also trains them to defend their land from external dangers.'

'You are a modern Solon!'

'The Solon of an unnoticed island,' replied Justinian, with a smile. 'Well, you see, owing to the

exigencies of modern life, I am forced to go in for quality rather than quantity—to rule a tribe instead of a nation—to govern an island rather than a continent. Nevertheless, you know the saying, “From small events, what mighty causes spring ;” so, perchance, my miniature government, when it develops into a larger one, may not be without some influence in this often misgoverned world.’

‘Justinian,’ said Maurice, with irrepressible curiosity, ‘who are you?’

‘Demarch of Melnos.’

‘Forgive me!’ replied Maurice, flushing, as he noticed the pointed rebuke. ‘I know the question I have asked is a breach of good-breeding ; but you are such an extraordinary man, that I must be excused for wondering from whence you came.’

‘I am not angry at your question,’ returned Justinian, touched by the frankness of the young man ; ‘the spectacle of an old Englishman with such projects is, perhaps, calculated to arouse curiosity. However, I will promise to tell you all about myself when a certain event, which I dearly desire, comes to pass.’

‘And that event?’

Justinian smiled meaningly, and let his eyes fall upon Helena, upon which Maurice flushed red with

delight, and would have spoken, but that the wary old man shook his head, as a sign that he was to keep silence.

‘Andros!’ he whispered significantly; ‘another time.’

Maurice saw that Caliphronas was walking towards them, and wisely held his peace, although it was difficult for him to repress the delight which the hint of Justinian had awakened in his breast. To have this queen among women as his own, to pass his life by her side, to always have her beautiful face before his eyes,—it was too good to be true. Yet true it was, for Justinian had unmistakably shown his approbation of the match. As to Caliphronas, the young Englishman had no fear; he had given his rival plainly to understand that he would strive his hardest to win Helena, and the Greek could not accuse him of being involved in any way in Justinian’s crafty diplomacy. Maurice Roylands was essentially an honourable man, and, despite the necessity for such treachery, the under-handed dealings of the Demarch were revolting to his sense of honesty, and he was glad he had come to a complete understanding with the Count, so that, when Justinian showed his hand in the deep game he was playing, Caliphronas could not charge his rival with

underhand dealings in ever so slight a degree. As to Helena, this straightforward lover was not so ignorant of the ways of women as not to know she liked him best, in spite of her coquettings with Caliphronas ; therefore he felt quite confident that Helena would not be cruel enough to refuse him.

His meditations were put an end to by Crispin, who approached with Dick, on whose behalf he proffered a challenge to Mr. Roylands.

‘Here you are, Maurice,’ said the poet cheerily. ‘Dick wishes to know if you will be his antagonist in a boxing contest?’

‘Certainly, I shall be delighted ; but I am afraid, Dick, you will have the best of it, as I haven’t touched the gloves for the last few months.’

‘I’m not in good training myself, sir,’ replied Dick modestly ; ‘but I’d dearly love to have a turn with you, sir, if I may make so bold, just to show these darned Greeks how to use their fists.’

‘Don’t you speak contemptuously of these darned Greeks, my friend,’ said Crispin dryly ; ‘some of Justinian’s men have no small skill in boxing, I can tell you.’

‘Not Caliphronas,’ remarked Maurice, recalling his contest with the Count on the first day of the feast.

‘Caliphronas!’ echoed Crispin scornfully. ‘No; he is too much afraid of his beauty being spoiled to go in for hard knocks; but he is a good leaper, Maurice, so you will have to look to your University laurels.’

“‘And can I fail before my lady’s eyes?’” quoted Maurice jestingly.

‘Perhaps not; but remember Caliphronas is also exhibiting his prowess in his lady’s eyes: so you are like two knights of the Middle Ages tilting before the Queen of Beauty. If you fail, my poor Maurice’—

‘*Væ victis*,’ retorted Roylands, with a laugh; ‘keep your lamentations till after the contest, Mr. Aristophanes. Jove! how that fellow scuds!’

A one-mile race was going on, four times round the arena, which was a quarter of a mile in circumference, and about half a dozen men had started, among whom was Temistocles, the young Greek who had won the wine-skin dance on the first day of the festival. He had shot slightly ahead of his competitors, who were making great efforts to catch him up; but Maurice, an adept in such things, saw that he was exhausting himself in the effort to keep the lead, and, as it was only the first lap, would not be able to hold out to the end going at such a pace.

‘Crispin, tell that fellow leading to reserve himself for the last round.’

‘What for?’

‘Because he’s taking too much out of himself, stupid. Quick, shout as he passes.’

The runners were now flying past the winning-post, which was directly in front of Justinian’s throne, so Crispin sang out loudly in Greek to Temistocles as Maurice had instructed him. The young Palikar was no fool, and saw that the advice was good, so he let the two behind him gain his side, and took a second place between them and the ruck. Only this trio were in the race, for the remaining three were already well blown, and Temistocles, acting on the wary advice given, wanted his two most dangerous opponents to exhaust themselves. During the second lap, one of the last three men threw up the sponge, as also did another at the third round, and the hinder man being completely out of it, the interest in the race centred in the two leading runners and Temistocles, who followed closely behind. Neck and neck ran the first two, making violent efforts to pass one another, quite unaware of the danger behind them, so that at the final lap they were getting somewhat stale. Half-way round

the arena, one gained slightly on the other, and, thinking he was now pretty certain of the victory, ran home at full speed, but Temistocles, who had been mustering his strength, saw that the decisive moment had come, and, shooting past him like an arrow, gained the goal four lengths ahead. The applause during this exciting race was tremendous, and the onlookers cheered themselves hoarse when Temistocles won ; while that grateful young man came to thank Crispin for the hint which had gained him the victory.

‘Do not thank me,’ said Crispin, smiling, as he drew Roylands forward ; ‘Kyrios Maurice told me what to say.’

Temistocles expressed himself much beholden to the lord, and went off to receive the congratulations of his friends, while the next item on the programme, which was a boxing contest, began. Both Maurice and Dick watched this exhibition of pugilistic science critically, and came to the conclusion that, while the islanders were active enough in dodging and hitting, they had not sufficient strength to make their blows effective enough when they hit home. It was all dexterity and avoidance with them, which made the fight pretty enough to look on, but scarcely exciting

from an English point of view. Still, one of these light-weight Greeks was enough to tire out any ordinary boxer, and, once having exhausted his antagonist, could hope to tap him pretty freely, and thus come off victor.

At last, after several contests, Maurice and Dick putting on the gloves stepped into the arena, and, after shaking hands in time-honoured fashion, began to spar warily at one another. Both were much heavier-built men than the spare-framed Greeks, but were pretty equally matched in point of weight and science. If anything, Dick had the quicker eye of the two, while Roylands possessed the longest reach. Justinian, an old boxing man himself, was as keen as a needle over this glove match, and came down from his seat, in order to get a closer view of the battle, while the Melnosians, equally interested, crowded round eagerly to watch the contest.

After sparring lightly for a time, Maurice made a feint, and let out straight home, but Dick was on his guard, and parried the blow with his right, catching his antagonist a lifter on the jaw with his left. Secretly annoyed at this, Roylands made rapid play, and succeeded in landing a stunner on Dick's eye before the active sailor could dodge. Maurice got

the worst of the first round, Dick of the second, so it seemed difficult to foresee who would finally triumph. In the third Maurice got a nasty one in the ribs, but, feinting with his left, extended his right rapidly in that dexterous blow known as 'the policeman's knock,' which, catching Dick full on the face, had the effect of tumbling him over on the grass. In the fourth round, however, Dick recovered his lost ground by blowing his antagonist first, then coming home with a tremendous rap on the left ear which made Maurice see stars. The Greeks were frenzied with excitement, and even Justinian, Caliphronas, and Crispin caught the contagion, and yelled as loudly as the rest at every successful blow. Not so active as the cat-like sailor, Maurice was getting a trifle blown, and thought he was going to disgrace himself in Helena's eyes, and, what was worse, in Caliphronas', by being beaten, so, when the fifth round began, made up his mind to come off best. By this time he was pretty well versed in Dick's tactics, and when the sailor closed in with a right-hand feint, in order to come home with his left, Maurice dodged like lightning, and, breaking down Dick's guard, punished him severely on the nose. Both men's blood was now up, and indeed Dick's

was showing, as it streamed from what is called, in the graceful language of the prize ring, 'his smeller,' so at the sixth round the onlookers saw that the final bout would be a severe one.

All the women were rather nervous at this savage contest, and Helena, pale as a lily at the sight of blood, was clinging to her father's arm, inwardly breathing prayers for the success of her hero, for so she now regarded Maurice. Dick had now quite lost his head, and was quite reckless, while Maurice was as cool and calm as ever, his self-control standing him in good stead in parrying Dick's furious onslaughts. Still the sailor managed to draw blood freely, much to the secret joy of Caliphronas, who would have liked nothing better than to see Maurice's handsome face spoiled, when Roylands, setting his teeth like a vice, tried to close in with his opponent for the final tussle. For a minute the two men dodged rapidly, feinted, parried, sparred, and did their best to break down one another's guard, when Dick, losing his self-control, hit out recklessly in a wild fashion, upon which Maurice sent one blow after another home like a sledge-hammer, and ended the fight with a tremendous left-hander, which levelled Dick almost insensible on the ground.

Every man on the ground, aroused by the sight of blood, fairly went mad, and, when Dick went off, supported by two of his messmates, wanted to carry the victor in schoolboy fashion round the ground on their shoulders, a triumph which Maurice declined, and retired to cleanse himself of blood. Long after was that fight remembered, and the local poet made a kind of Iliad out of the struggle, which was compared to the triumph of Achilles over Hector, Maurice of course being the son of silver-footed Thetis.

The sports went on during the whole of the long day, as if the competitors would never tire, and there were flat-racing, hurdle-racing, jumping, wrestling, and further boxing, until late in the afternoon. Then Gurt put his men through their cutlass drill, and Justinian manœuvred the whole male population of the island, much to his own satisfaction and that of Maurice, who saw that the Melnosians were capitally drilled.

‘Where did you learn all your military science?’ he asked Justinian when the drill was over.

‘I was in the army once,’ replied the old Demarch, with great pride.

‘What regiment, may I ask?’

‘I cannot tell you that yet.’

‘You are as mysterious as Crispin.’

‘There are a good many mysteries in this Island of Fantasy, Mr. Roylands,’ retorted Justinian good-humouredly, ‘and when they are all solved, you will be surprised in more ways than one. Have you been a soldier yourself?’

‘No! I am a man of peace, but my Uncle Rudolph was a lieutenant in a line regiment.

‘Ah, your lost uncle!’ said the Demarch, with an ambiguous smile. ‘You must tell me your family history some day.’

‘I am afraid it will be necessary soon,’ replied Maurice, glancing at Helena.

‘Ah, you think so? Well, remember my desire about you being my successor, Maurice. I must have your answer shortly.’

‘You shall have it as soon as I hear from England.’

‘Well, that will be soon. I have a boat waiting at Syra for your letters, so I trust you will get your reply, and Crispin his yacht, shortly.’

‘Then you still anticipate trouble?’

‘I do! Remember we have here one possessing the fatal name of Helena. She is the firebrand, as you well know; but we will talk of these things another time, my son. Meanwhile, let us come and look at the shooting.’

As Maurice turned to accompany the old man, he felt a soft touch on his arm, and, on looking down, saw that Helena, with an expression of pity on her beautiful face, was looking at him.

‘Are you hurt, Maurice?’ she said anxiously.

‘No, not at all!’ he replied, laughing. ‘Dick gave me a nasty one on the nose, which is rather painful, but nothing to speak of. But to-morrow I will be such a sight as you will shudder to behold.’

‘I would rather see a brave man disfigured, than a handsome coward,’ retorted Helena, with disdain, casting a side look at the distant form of Caliphronas.

‘Oh, and you think Caliphronas is’—

‘Very nice,’ interrupted Helena cruelly. ‘Yes, he is delightful!’

‘I believe you are very fond of Caliphronas,’ said Maurice, displeased at this speech.

‘I don’t think you are, Maurice,’ pouted the girl, looking down.

‘Assuredly I’m not, and to prove this, I will do my best to beat him at the high jump!’

‘If you do,’ said Helena gaily, ‘I will give you a rose.’

‘Of what colour, you coquette,—red for love, or white for silence?’

‘Neither! Yellow for jealousy!’

She ran away after her father with a silvery laugh, in which Maurice, in spite of his vexation, could not help joining, as the charming coquetry of this young girl was delightful enough to fascinate him, and annoying enough to pique his pride, of which Mr. Roylands had no small share.

‘She is the loveliest woman in the world,’ he said to himself, sauntering towards the shooting party, ‘and if I win her I shall be the most fortunate of beings. But I am afraid she is a coquette, or else it is a woman’s way of provoking love. Hullo, Dick! is this you?’ he added aloud, as the boatswain, considerably battered, approached him. ‘I’m afraid I’ve knocked you up a bit.’

‘Not a bit of it, sir,’ replied Dick, heartily grasping the young Englishman’s extended hand. ‘I’ll be as right as a trivet to-morrow; but, my word, sir, I shouldn’t like to meet you without the gloves!’

‘I don’t know so much about that, Dick. You were a pretty tough antagonist, I can tell you!’

‘So Zoe thought, sir, when she saw me,’ grinned

Dick, displaying his white teeth ; 'she thought it was Gurt, sir !'

'And was sorry it wasn't, perhaps?'

'I'm blest if she was, Mr. Roylands ! I'm the white-haired boy in that quarter, sir.'

'And Gurt?'

'Oh, he don't mind, sir. He's not a marrying man—I am.'

'And you intend to marry Zoe?'

'If she'll have me, sir.'

'I don't think there's much fear of that, Dick,' replied Maurice genially.

'I hope not, sir ; but women are queer creatures.'

'They are, indeed, Dick,' answered Maurice, with a sigh, thinking of Helena and her dexterity in avoiding his wooing, yet keeping him a fast captive in her chains.

'What I'd like you to do, sir,' said Dick reflectively, 'is to have the gloves on with Mr. Caliphronas !'

'Why so?'

For answer Dick pointed to his own swollen face, and grinned meaningly, whereupon Maurice walked away, laughing to think of the Count's handsome countenance in such a scarred condition.

The shooting was going on splendidly, and all the

Melnosians proved themselves good marksmen, more or less, while Justinian himself was a crack shot, and made one centre after the other in a most surprising manner.

‘Will you have a try, Maurice?’ he said, when the young man reached him.

‘Not to-day, sir. I’m too shaky after that fight, and wish to keep up all my strength for the high jump.’

‘You have a tough antagonist in Caliphronas!’

‘I know that,’ rejoined Maurice uneasily, ‘but I’m hanged if I’ll let him beat me. His bragging would never cease. Bravo, Crispin!’

Crispin had just made a bull’s eye, and was rejoicing in a modest way over his success, so Maurice, to encourage him, patted his shoulder.

‘What a pity Eunice is not here to see!’ said Roylands, laughing.

‘I’m afraid Eunice would not appreciate my skill!’

‘My dear lad, she would appreciate anything you did.’

‘I don’t think her mother would!’

‘As long as you have twelve thousand a year, Mrs. Dengelton will think you an Admirable Crichton.’

‘Not without a name!’

‘You have a name as good as any in England,’ said Justinian, touching the poet on the shoulder, ‘and what it is I will tell you, when all these troubles are over.’

This was the first time the Demarch had spoken so plainly, and Crispin was much elated thereat.

‘I am quite content, for I know you will keep your promise.’

‘You are right!’ rejoined Justinian proudly. ‘I never break a promise, unless with regard to Punic faith.’

Caliphronas heard this saying, but of course did not understand the significance of the remark, and strolled away in order to look at the high jump, which was being put up near the throne of Justinian. The shooting being at an end, the rest of the party followed, and took their seats for the final contest of the day, which was to be the competition of the Greek and the Englishman in the high jump.

The two competitors came forward, as lightly clad as possible, in order to give themselves every advantage in the contest, and two finer specimens of manly grace it would have been hard to find. Caliphronas was as lithe and sinewy as a panther, with

grace in every movement; while Maurice, who was the heavier built of the two, had not a spare ounce of flesh on his body, thanks to his active athletic training during his residence in Melnos. Both were fair-haired and handsome, but the delicately moulded face of the graceful Greek had a cunning expression which was quite absent from the more manly looks of the Englishman. With supreme conceit Caliphronas quite expected to gain the victory, while Maurice, in spite of his University record, could not help feeling a trifle uneasy as he looked at the springy grace of his antagonist, besides which he still felt a trifle shaken by the glove-fight, even though it had taken place during the earlier part of the day.

Caliphronas jumped first, and, poising himself on the ball of his foot about ten yards off, made for the tape, which was extended between two upright poles, with the speed of a deer. It was four feet ten high, and, presenting no obstacle to an accomplished leaper like himself, he cleared it easily with the lightness of a flying bird. Maurice followed, and also went over without the least difficulty, amid the applause of the spectators, much to the Greek's secret vexation, as he saw his antagonist was fresher than he thought,

and no mean athlete to be scorned. Four eleven was also cleared cleanly by both, though in the air, Maurice's feet were perilously near the tape, a fact which Caliphronas, who was eagerly watching, noted with delight. The height was now five feet, at which Caliphronas, unfortunately for himself, went with over-confidence, so that he touched the tape lightly. Intensely vexed at his failure, he could only hope that Maurice also would touch, but the Englishman set his teeth determinedly, and cleared the five feet with the bound of a deer. The Greek, mad with anger at thus being beaten, and furious at the applause of the spectators, loudly swore that the jump was a chance one, whereupon Maurice walked straight up to him, with an angry face.

‘Count Caliphronas, you forget yourself, and you forget me, to make such a statement. There was no fluke about the matter, and, to prove it to you, we will both jump the five over again.’

Justinian disapproved of this, but Maurice was firm, and Caliphronas was only too delighted to have another chance of beating his hated enemy ; so, once more going to the start, he made a rapid run, and cleared the jump, by a hair's-breadth, it is true—still he cleared it.

‘Now, Mr. Maurice,’ he said ungenerously, forgetting the noble way in which the Englishman had acted. ‘Let us see if you can do that twice.’

‘I will not do it twice, sir.’

‘I thought not!’ retorted the Greek exultantly; ‘so I have won.’

‘Not yet! you forget I also have cleared the five; but, to prove to you that my jump was no fluke, I challenge you to five one.’

‘You’ll never do it, Maurice,’ whispered Crispin in alarm. ‘Jump the five again, and let the match be a tie.’

‘I’m hanged if I will!’ retorted the Englishman fiercely; ‘I have done better than five one at Oxford, and if it had not been for the gloves, I’d do it again. At all events, I’ll try this jump, Count Caliphronas.’

In fair play the Count could not refuse the challenge, although he was pale with anger, so, knowing he would never clear that extra inch, went half-heartedly towards the start. Such a faint spirit is not conducive to victory, and Caliphronas not only touched, but fell heavily on the ground, much to his chagrin. Then it was Maurice’s turn, and, measuring the distance with his eye, he placed himself some fifteen yards from the tape. Helena clasped her

hands with nervous fear, the spectators held their breath, as Maurice, pale in face, but stout in heart, came flying forward, and, soaring upward like a bird, cleared the five one with consummate ease. There was a wild cheer from the crowd, especially from the British tars, who rejoiced greatly at the way in which Maurice was upholding the honour of England, and the victor found his two hands nearly shaken off by Crispin and Justinian. As soon as he could get free, he looked for Caliphronas, but the Greek, too petty-souled to bear his defeat, had vanished, nor was he seen in the arena for the rest of the afternoon.

The games being concluded, Helena distributed the prizes, which were useful articles, especially selected by Justinian for these occasions. Caliphronas had won several races, and also the wrestling contest, but could not receive his prize, owing to his non-appearance, concerning which no one seemed sorry, so universally hated was he for his arrogance. Temistocles, Dick, Gurt, and others, were duly rewarded for their prowess in the athletic field, and then Maurice knelt before Helena to receive his prize. Justinian had been somewhat puzzled what to give his guest, as the simple articles loved by the villagers

were hardly acceptable to the travelled Englishman. Helena, however, solved the problem, and hastily twisting together a wreath of wild olives, placed it lightly on his bent head.

‘For you,’ said Justinian, as he arose a crowned victor, and kissed the hand of Helena, ‘we can have no fairer prize than the Olympian wreath of old.’

‘You should now have a Pindaric ode,’ exclaimed Crispin gaily; ‘but alas! I am not Pindar, and you must be content with the old Archilochian shout, “Hail, Victorious!”’

The valley rang with the cries of the delighted Greeks; and Caliphronas, seated on a summit of the grand staircase, heard the triumphal shouts with wrath in his heart.

‘He has beaten me in the games,’ he hissed between his clenched teeth, ‘but he shall not beat me in love. I will ask Helena to-night to be my wife, and then, my Englishman!’

A third shout came from the valley below, but Caliphronas only laughed scornfully.

‘And then, my Englishman!’



CHAPTER XXVI.

BEAUTIFUL PARIS, EVIL-HEARTED PARIS.

*What ! would'st thou force me to thine evil will,
And bear me far away in benchèd ships,
A second Helen, to a second Troy,
Whose flight would raise a second ten years' war ?
Nay, sir ! the gods are dead ! and not in me
Beholdest thou proud Aphrodite's slave.
My judgment's as I will, and uncontrolled
By Venus, who would fain bestow on thee
The fairest woman, so that thou proclaim
Her fairest of Olympian goddesses.
Go hence alone ! I'll none of thee or thine
Troy's fallen, and Helen dead,—so Paris loses
The game which Atë's cursèd fruit began.*



YOU beat me fairly,' said Caliphronas frankly to Maurice that night. 'It was foolish of me to be angry, but you must admit defeat is hard to bear.'

The Greek did not mean a word of this very pretty speech, as Maurice was well aware ; still he could not but accept it as meant in good faith, and thus a

hollow truce was made between the two young men, which either was ready to break on the slightest provocation. However, it was a pity to mar the pleasantness of the evening by continuous bickering; so, with smiles on their faces and distrust in their hearts, Caliphronas and his declared enemy sat down to table on apparently the best of terms with one another.

On their return from the games, all had enjoyed the delights of the bath, no small pleasure after a fatiguing day, and now, in their loose indoor robes, were partaking of refreshment. All was going merrily, and, from an outside point of view, a more united party could scarcely be found; yet one and all felt that this was but the ominous calm before the breaking of the storm. The Demarch, astute in the interpreting of signs, saw that matters were approaching a crisis which could not be averted, and that the disaffection of Caliphronas, consequent on his refusal by Helena, would take place sooner than had been anticipated. That the Count would propose to his daughter that evening he had but little doubt, as he saw that, smarting under his defeat in the games, Caliphronas was determined to equalise himself in the eyes of all by gaining Helena's consent

to the marriage, as a set-off against the Englishman's triumph. This being the case, Justinian was equally sure that Helena would promptly refuse the Greek, whom she so much disliked ; in which case Caliphronas would call upon him to enforce the marriage, and then the whole truth would have to be revealed, after which the Demarch had little doubt but that the Count's next step would be to leave the island and range himself openly on the side of Alcibiades.

Truth to tell, the old man was rather anxious for the storm to burst, as the suspense was rapidly becoming unbearable ; and as, judging from the review that day, all the Melnosians were well prepared for war, he did not mind if Caliphronas, out of wounded vanity, precipitated the affair sooner than was expected. Again, as the Greek had told him all the plans of Alcibiades, he had no further use for him ; so, being prepared in every way for trouble, Justinian was in no wise sorry that affairs should come to a head at once, and that Alcibiades and his threatened invasion should be crushed forthwith. The insolence of Caliphronas also was becoming unbearable to the proud old Demarch, therefore he desired to hasten rather than retard the explosion ; and, had he not seen that Caliphronas

was bent upon bringing matters to a crisis himself, would have doubtless hinted the necessity of a marriage proposal being made at once.

With Maurice and Caliphronas veiling their hatred of each other under artificial smiles, with Justinian watchful for the expected catastrophe, with Helena anxious, she knew not why, at the Greek's burning glances, it will be easily seen that the merriment over the supper-table was rather forced. The only truly happy member of the party was Crispin, who, unsuspecting of ill, and rejoicing in having the promise of the Demarch to reveal all about his parentage, was laughing and jesting gaily in the highest of spirits.

‘I think you can congratulate yourself on the three days of the festival having been a perfect success,’ he said to Justinian, who sat concealing his real feelings under a quiet smile.

‘Yes; everything went off very well. Andros, you, as the god of wine, were the hero of the first day.’

‘And Crispin, as Æschylus-Aristophanes, of the second,’ cried Maurice brightly.

‘Not forgetting Maurice, as the athlete Milo of the third,’ replied the poet, raising his glass.

‘Oh dear, dear!’ said Helena, with a merry smile; ‘I am afraid this is a mutual admiration society.’

god, poet, athlete; you are all flattering yourselves, but no one says a good word for me.'

'It is impossible to flatter perfection,' remarked Caliphronas, with one of his burning glances; 'besides, you have been the queen of the three days, and we are all secondary characters. The stars are not the rivals of the sun.'

'Why did you not say the moon?' said Helena, fastening a red rose in the breast of her robe. 'I love the moon better than the sun.'

'You are the inviolate Artemis!'

'Without an Endymion.'

It was an unlucky remark, and Helena regretted having made it when she saw how fiercely her two lovers glanced at one another.

'Artemis waited a long time for her shepherd, but he came at last,' said the Greek significantly.

'And did nothing but sleep when he did come,' cried Maurice angrily; 'a pretty lover truly! Helena, you are no moon-goddess, but your namesake of Troy—the world's desire.'

'Yet even Helen had her Paris,' interposed Caliphronas quickly.

'Every woman has her Paris now-a-days,' said Crispin quickly, to forestall the angry reply of the

rival lover; 'only it is a city instead of a man, which is just as charming and more manageable. If Menelaus had been ruler of Lutetia, Helen would never have been persuaded to leave it for a dull provincial town like Troy.'

"Beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris!" observed Justinian quietly. 'Tennyson's line would apply equally to the son of Priam or the city of pleasure. There, Crispin, is a subject for a song, which idea I will make you a present of for nothing.'

'Sing of Paris the city,' cried Helena vivaciously.

'No, of Paris the man,' said Maurice, with a glance at Caliphronas.

'Sing of both,' rejoined that gentleman quickly, out of sheer contradiction.

'It is a hard task to improvise on so difficult a subject as "the Paris of Paris,"' remarked Crispin jestingly; 'however, I will try, although I have no lyre.'

'Take this myrtle,' said Helena, tossing him a twig across the table, 'and sing to it in the Greek fashion.'

'Maurice, you ought to give me your crown, so that myrtle and olive inspire me with the breath of the god.'

"King Pandion he is dead," rejoined Maurice lightly. 'The gods inspire no songs to-day, nor would

they be answerable for a mixture of the classic and romantic, such as your "Paris of Paris" is bound to be.'

'Judge for yourself, Thersites,' retorted the poet; and, holding the sprig of myrtle in his hand, after a few moments' thought, he began to sing in his pleasant voice the following words to a lively French air.

*Paris came to Helen when
Earth was younger ;
He was handsomest of men,
She was fairest woman then ;
And love's hunger
Made them long to run away,
Which they did one pleasant day—
So, at least, does Homer say—
Scandal-monger !*

*Helen comes to Paris now
Earth is older.
But no love shines on her brow,
Nor breaks she a marriage-vow,
Love is colder.
She but comes for triumphs here,
Dressed by Worth in costumes dear,
Lets existence gay pour rire
Lightly mould her.*

*Yet if Paris, town of joy,
Holds a Paris,
Charming as the Trojan boy,
Life is bliss without alloy ;
There no bar is
To indulge in love once more ;
So with Paris, as of yore,
Flies she as she fled before,
But she marries.*

‘Oh, “Roses of Shiraz!”’ sighed Maurice comically, ‘what would your admirers say if they heard such *vers de société*?’

‘Improvisation is hardly serious work!’ retorted Crispin coolly, drinking his wine.

‘And your sentiments!’ cried Caliphronas in mock horror. ‘You have made Helen prim.’

‘’Tis in keeping with this virtuous century.’

‘For my part,’ said Helena of Melnos playfully, ‘I think your modern reading of the story is charming. Crispin, I appoint you my poet laureate.’

‘And my wages?’

‘A wreath of artificial laurels, for, indeed, your song is but worthy of such.’

‘Cruel! And I always thought you so soft-hearted.’

‘Never judge by outward appearances,’ said Helena, rising from her seat. ‘I am as hard-hearted as papa—on occasions.’

‘I hope not on all occasions?’ observed Caliphronas, with emphasis.

‘Entirely depends upon the situation. To you, now, I could refuse nothing—if I were inclined to grant your request.’

She vanished, laughing, through the curtains, and Maurice looked at Justinian, to see if he had espied

any hidden meaning in his daughter's words ; but the face of the old Demarch was as expressionless as a mask, while the Count's, bright with joy, betrayed the certainty he felt of receiving an answer in the affirmative to his proposal of marriage.

Truly, women are queer creatures, as Dick had observed during the day, and if Helena did not intend to marry Caliphronas, it was curious that she should thus raise up his hopes, only to dash them down again. Juliet, with her simile of a silk-gyved bird, trying to fly away, yet ever drawn back again by the detaining thread, is a typical woman, who scorns her lover, so that he departs angrily, yet, when she sees him leaving her, woos him back with tender words, only to repeat her former cruelty. Helena, in spite of her girlish simplicity, yet knew these two men were in love with her, and tortured the one and was kind to the other, turn and turn about, just as it suited her humour—why, it is impossible to say, unless the legend that every woman was once a cat be true, and they yet retain a sufficiency of the feline nature to make them love such cruel mouse play. Yesterday Helena said she disliked the Greek, now she roundly asserted she could refuse him nothing ; and, whether she was in earnest or fun, there was

no doubt that the Count was about to take her at her word, and ask her to become his wife.

In spite of Crispin's valiant efforts, the conversation languished after the departure of Helena, the Demarch being somewhat preoccupied, and Maurice too cross to talk ; while Caliphronas, after replying mechanically for a time, finally went off in search of the lady he had made up his mind to marry. The three men left at the table looked meaningly at one another, for they guessed the reason of this sudden exit, yet none of them made any reference to the affair, as it would be quite time enough to discuss it when Caliphronas was refused.

Meanwhile, Caliphronas rushed onward to his fate, in utter ignorance of the real feelings which Helena entertained towards him, and found her leaning against one of the pillars in the court, listening to the singing of a nightingale, much in the same position as she had occupied when first seen by Maurice, two months previous. She turned with a smile when the Greek entered the court, but he held up his hand for her to keep silence, and both of them for some time continued to listen to the delicious music. The passionate song of the distant bird flooding the warm night with melody, the thin, pale light of the moon pouring in

white radiance on the white marble court, the intoxicating perfume of the flowers around, and the delicate noise of the falling fountain, all thrilled the heart of the impressionable Greek with a sensuous feeling of delight, and stretching out his hand gently, he laid it lightly on the bare arm of the girl he loved.

Startled by the touch, Helena rather indignantly turned round to reprove him for taking such a liberty ; but the words died on her lips as she saw the handsome face of this man, irradiated with passionate love, bending towards her. Tall and straight as a cypress, his lithe figure gracefully draped in a white robe, he looked like some gracious deity of the past, wooing a mortal maiden, while the burning gaze of his eyes seemed to scorch her with their ardour. It was the animal look in them that thus made her flush hotly, and, with a sudden movement of outraged virginal dignity, she retreated slowly towards the silver pool of the fountain.

‘Do not shrink from me like that, Helena!’ murmured Caliphronas in Greek, as he came towards her lightly as a fawn. ‘I wish to tell you the meaning of the bird’s song.’

‘What do you mean, Andros?’ she asked uneasily.

‘Do you think Aristophanes understood it?’ pursued

the Greek, taking no notice of her question ; ‘he put it into words, you know. Tio ! tio ! tio-tiolix—No, that is not the song, but a mere assemblage of words. What is the divine nightingale now singing ? Can you not guess ? It is of love—of love—of love ! My love for you—your love for me, my queen. Hark ! out the strains gush rapturously through the night—it is speaking of love eternal—my love for thee, joy of my heart !’

‘You jest, Andros !’ said Helena faintly, not at all liking the tone of this poetical rhapsody.

‘Jest !’ cried Caliphronas, ardently seizing her hand ; ‘no, I speak true to you, rose of this isle ! I love you ! I worship you ! I desire you for my wife !’

‘Your wife !’ she echoed, snatching her hand away. ‘Are you mad ?’

‘With love of thee—yes !’

‘Do not touch me, sir. How dare you insult me !’

‘Insult !’ said Caliphronas, starting as if he were stung. ‘What do you mean, girl ? Is the offer of a man’s heart an insult !’

‘You are surely not in earnest,’ said the girl, much perplexed what to say. ‘I had no idea you loved me !’

‘I am in earnest, and I do love you,’ declared

Caliphronas, with fiery energy, coming so close to her that she could feel his hot breath on her cheek. 'You must have seen my passion long since. I want you to be my wife—your father and I have settled it between us.'

It was the worst speech that he could have made, for Helena, with a cry of rage, pushed him fiercely back, and stood before him with clenched hands, her eyes bright with indignation.

'How dare you! how dare you! Am I not to be consulted in the matter?—do you think I will allow myself to be handed over to you like a slave? Never! I would rather die! I will not be your wife! I refuse to listen to you!'

'But you do not understand,' said Caliphronas, rather crestfallen at this sudden outburst of anger.

'I do understand. You have spoken to my father, and he has permitted you to ask me to be your wife, but, as to it being settled—how dare you! I will not be your wife! Don't you dare to suggest such a thing to me!'

'I mean to be heard,' began the Greek, but she cut him short with a sudden stamp of her foot.

'You can mean what you like,' she said imperiously, 'but heard you will not be!'

‘You beautiful fury!’

‘Go away and leave me!’

‘Helena,’ cried the Count, falling on his knees, ‘I love you! I adore you! Do not refuse to be my wife.’

‘I do refuse!’

‘But your father?’

‘Leave my father out of the question, Andros. You have asked me to be your wife, and I tell you plainly, “No.” Perhaps I have been rather angry, but when you ask a woman to honour you by becoming your wife, you should not treat her as if she were a bundle of goods to be handed from one man to another.’

‘You refuse me?’ asked Caliphronas, hardly able to believe his own ears.

‘I do, once and for all! Come, Andros, stop talking such nonsense, and forget all this scene.’

‘Why will you not be my wife?’ asked the Count doggedly, rising from his knees.

‘Because I do not love you.’

‘Not love me!’

‘No, my sultan. Do you think I am a woman to fall at your feet when you thus throw the handkerchief?’

Caliphronas, who had suppressed his rage with difficulty, now burst out in a passion of furious anger, hardly knowing what he was saying.

‘I know the reason you refuse me. Yes, you do well to turn away your head. You love this cursed Englishman. Ah, you cannot deny it! you are afraid to look me in the face.’

‘I am not afraid—there!’

She faced him boldly, and the Greek, maddened beyond control, seized her by the wrist with a grasp like iron, yet she neither winced nor cried.

‘Is it thus a woman should proffer her love?’ hissed Caliphronas, white with passion; ‘this Englishman loves you not, and yet you throw yourself at his feet.’

‘I do not. Leave go my hand!’ she cried, wincing with pain, yet keeping a bold front, upon which he flung her from him with a furious oath.

‘I will marry you, in spite of your refusal.’

‘Never! I will die rather than be your wife.’

The young man tried to speak, but, choking with passion, could say nothing; so, stamping with impotent fury, he rushed to the principal entrance of the court and tore aside the curtains.

‘You have refused to marry me,’ he cried in a

strangled voice. 'I accept your refusal, but you will be mine soon. I will storm the island, I will drag you in chains away, and when I tire of you then will I sell you as a slave to the Turk!'

He dashed out of the court with a scream of rage, leaving Helena standing white as a marble statue, with her hands across her breast, which was heaving tempestuously with rage at the Greek's insolence. If she had, girl as she was, refused the offer of Caliphronas in a somewhat undignified manner, she was now every inch a woman, who, not knowing the meaning of the word 'fear,' was fiercely angered at the insult to her womanly pride. The soft, graceful girl had disappeared, and in her place stood Clytemnestra, fearlessly daring the dagger of Orestes. Suddenly she felt a touch on her arm.

'Father!'

'I know what has occurred. You are worn out with excitement, so go at once to bed.'

'But Andros'—

'I will deal with him.'

'You know I refused him.'

'Yes, I heard you say so.'

'Was it your wish I should marry him, as he said?'

‘Girl, I would rather see you dead, than the wife of that despicable coward,’ retorted the Demarch fiercely. ‘Now retire at once, and leave me to settle the matter. Good-night.’

‘Good-night, father.’

She turned to go with an air of utter lassitude, but the strain of the last half-hour had completely broken her down, and suddenly, with a low cry, she burst into tears. Justinian caught her in his arms, and began to soothe her tenderly with endearing words, which moved the girl strangely, for she was quite unused to such caresses from her iron-natured father.

‘My girl, my little child, you must not weep!’ whispered the old man, kissing her white face. ‘All will yet be well, and never shall you see this vile Andros again. He shall leave the island at once. You did well to refuse him, and I am proud of the spirit you displayed. Come, come! you must weep no more. I know all.’

‘You know?’ she faltered, looking at him in astonishment.

‘Yes, I know, and I approve. Now, good-night, my darling, and sleep well.’

He led her slowly to the door, and, having summoned Zoe, sent the girl to bed at once in charge.

of her maid, then returned to the centre of the court and looked frowningly at the entrance through which Caliphronas had disappeared.

‘You dared to speak like that to my child!’ he murmured fiercely. ‘It is well you fled, or, old as I am, you would not have left this court alive. It is war between us now, Andros, and if I gain the victory, you had better have died than spoken as you have done to-night.’

Maurice, whistling gaily, came into the court, having left Crispin behind at the table, but, when he caught sight of Justinian’s face, stopped short in dismay.

‘What is the matter, Justinian?’

‘Nothing more than what I expected.’

‘About Caliphronas?’

‘Yes; he has proposed to Helena, and she has refused him.’

Maurice drew a long breath of relief.

‘I am glad of that; now there will be a chance for me.’

‘You love my daughter?’ asked the Demarch suddenly.

‘Yes, I love her,’ replied Roylands simply; ‘I have always loved her.’

‘I am glad of that, Maurice.’

‘You will permit me to ask Helena to be my wife?’

‘Willingly. It is my dearest wish; in fact, it was for that reason I brought you here.’

‘Brought me here, sir!’ said Roylands in amazement.

‘Why, did you know I was coming?’

‘Yes; I sent Caliphronas to England to persuade you if possible to pay me a visit.’

‘But how did you know such a person as I was in existence?’

The old Demarch took Maurice by the hand and spoke solemnly.

‘When you propose to and are accepted by my daughter, I will tell you all, and the mysteries which have so perplexed you shall do so no longer.’

‘I will speak to Helena to-morrow.’

‘Good. Then to-morrow I will tell you who I am, and how I was able to know all about you.’

‘But suppose Helena refuses me?’

Justinian smiled slightly.

‘She has refused Andrös, but you—ah, that is quite a different thing.’

‘Still’—

‘Tush, my son, you are too modest! In my days

young men were not so faint-hearted. Helena's a woman, therefore may be wooed.'

'True, but the question is, may she be won?'

'My good Mr. Roylands, did I not promise to tell you all about myself when you presented yourself as my future son-in-law?'

'Yes.'

'Well, by this time to-morrow you will know all, so as to what will occur in the meantime, I will leave to your imagination.'

'And Caliphronas?'

'Caliphronas,' repeated the Demarch slowly, 'means mischief, so, like the knights of old, you will win your bride at the point of a sword.'

'Oh, Justinian, if you only knew how I love her!'

The nightingale, hitherto silent, now began its song, upon which the old man good-humouredly pushed Maurice to the door.

'Go to bed, my son; that bird will tell me the tale of love much better than you will.'

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